

MAN CAVE: CREATING A SAFE COMMUNITY
FOR YOUNG MEN THROUGH
CONVERSATION

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ABSTRACT

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The context was Shiloh Baptist Church in El Paso, Texas. This project, "Man Cave: Creating a Safe Community for Young Men Through Conversation," was implemented to develop a space where young men can have conversation about life. It is often difficult for young men to find a safe space to express their emotions. Quantitative methods were used to observe participants' discussions, journaling, and pre- and post-interview questions. As a result of reading this research, young men will acquire the information and tools necessary to create friendships with one another as well as developing a deeper relationship with God.

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To my Shiloh Baptist Church Family, thank you for taking a chance on a then twenty-seven-year-old to be your eighth pastor. We started this journey together proclaiming that we would grow together, and surely that is exactly what has happened over these past few years. I want to say thank you for your patience, prayers, support, and love. It was difficult at some moments, but you all stuck it out with me. Therefore, I am

truly grateful. Also, I want to thank the leadership for your assistance and helping support your pastor during these times. To each male participants who assisted me with this project. Through your participation and sharing, it helped developed me during the time of helping you all. I am profoundly grateful for each one of you in the kingdom of God. Because of you I have continued to excel, and now because of you this project can be used to make the world a better place.

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INTRODUCTION

For my project, I am implementing what I call a Man Cave. This is where men between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five will be able to come find a safe space amongst other men to deal with life. Within this safe space we will create community and a brotherhood with one another where we can discuss some of the social and political challenges that face our worlds, but specifically those which affect our lives. The Man Cave will meet for an hour to two hours every week for six weeks. During this time, we will have discussion and just a time together where we can build relationships with each other. It is my hope that our time spent together will also help in the development of their relationship with God. In our discussions, we will also look at biblical passages of men who go through challenges as well and discuss how they overcame their situation.

It has not been until recently that there has been a push for the agenda of having Jesus and a therapist. This agenda for needing both and having both is so significant because there are still some people who would suggest that if you need a therapist, that must mean you don't have faith in Jesus who is a wonderful counselor. However, my rebuttal to that is that even Jesus shows us right here in this text that those who deal with mental illness may just need someone they can have conversation with and do community with. As a result, it is ok to have both because both are needed for healing to take place as well as restoration of the body, mind, and the soul. If community and conversation is not happening, there won't be any difference.

This is where my context and I connected. In chapter one, you will read how I was called to pastor a predominately African American church in El Paso, Texas. African Americans make up of 3.63% of an almost 700,000 population. Currently, Shiloh has 175 members on roll, but only about seventy-five of them are active. Some of those members are Hispanic and some are Caucasian. Despite the multi-ethnicity already present, Shiloh considers themselves to still be a predominate African American church. Currently there are 48.36% men in El Paso. In ten years, there will be a 0.33% increase, while at the same time there will be a 0.33% decrease in the population of women in El Paso.¹ As a result, I explore how to create community amongst the African American Men in El Paso, but more specifically the young men in my current context with the hope of it leading to helping them develop into better men in their families, church, and community.

Community is the other focus I must bring out. My Biblical Foundation paper is centered around the passage from Mark 5: 1-20. In this pericope of the text there is a demon possessed men who lives in the graveyard. One day he meets Jesus. When this demon possessed men meets Jesus, the Bible says they find this same one now sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. The reason I chose this biblical passage is because in the African American community we connect mental illness with being demon possessed. As a result, we always want to pray things out and downplay mental illness. We never really deal with depression, grief, and suicide in the African American church.

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¹ Experian Marketing Services, "The ExecutiveInsite Report 2021."

because there are still some people who would suggest that if you need a therapist, that must mean you don't have faith in Jesus who is a wonderful counselor. However, my rebuttal to that is that even Jesus shows us right here in this text that those who deal with mental illness may just need someone they can have conversation with and do community with. As a result, it is ok to have both because both are needed for healing to take place as well as restoration of the body, mind, and the soul. If community and conversation is not happening, there won't be any difference.

As a result, in chapter two I examine the man in Mark 5 that is living among the dead. Those who were in his community have decided to try to chain and bound him. They leave him in the grave to self-inflict himself by allowing him to cut himself with the stones. If they just would have provided him a safe space for community then the man could have had a different outcome and possibility. Since he lacked community though he is found in the grave, naked, screaming, and cutting himself.

My conclusion is that if men have a safe space to have conversation about their lives, then they will ultimately develop a better relationship with God. Some may experience salvation for the first time if this is the reality. It is important to note the definition Edward use for salvation and discipleship because I believe this is the focus of this project. Edward defines salvation and discipleship as a restored individual sitting at the feet of Jesus.”² I desire those men who will participate in my project will become restored whole and their desire will be to continue to have a relationship with Jesus by staying close to Him.

² J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 159.

In chapter three, I will look through history and see if a man cave has ever been created for especially towards African American men. After research, I discovered that historically, a Man cave has been done by the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA). “When George Williams founded the first YMCA in Industrial Revolution-era London, he sought to create a supportive community to help young men like himself address pressing social challenges.”³ However, over the years. The mission of the YMCA especially here in the United States have shifted. It is now a more of a family centered organization and it is open for all Men, Women, Boys, and Girls instead of just for the young men. One thing that I do like that the YMCA is determined to do is the Y has been “building spirit, mind and body for all. We know that strong people build strong communities – because we are all better together.”⁴ The reason my project is focusing specifically on men is because I see a need for male growth and development in our church, community, and city. I believe that when I help with the development of these young men, it will strengthen our communities. Nonetheless, the development can’t take place until we get together.

The purpose of the Man Cave is best described by the article about the Young Men's Christian Association of Montreal. The article states “The Association is an open door to every young man who wants the good as opposed to the evil. A home for young men away from home. A place of good resort for those who are living at home. It offers recreation without temptation. It offers a solid and enduring substitute for the fast life sought after by many young men. The warm hand of Christian helpfulness, the uplifting

³ The Y, “Our History,” YMCA of the USA, <https://www.ymca.org/who-we-are/our-history>.

⁴ The Y, “Our History.”

influence of good companionship and inspiration to right living are here extended.”⁵ This is really my desire for the Man Cave, I want to provide a place of resort for young men where they can find recreation from a Christian perspective. I want them to develop companionship and relationships that go beyond our time together within the six weeks we should share together.

How will I develop companionship between them while also developing their relationship with God? The way I will do this is by teaching and helping them understand the Imago Dei. This is what chapter four is centered around, helping understand how the theology of Imago Dei plays a significant role in the lives of African American men. The Imago Dei is the belief that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. According to Donald K. McKim, “Imago Dei (the image of God) is the condition in which humans were created so that they might have a relationship with God.”⁶ If I can help them see the Imago Dei within themselves and then within others it will help them have a relationship with God because they will understand that God is present in all especially those they are developing companionship with during the Man Cave.

Many people would argue that the Imago Dei being seen through others will not lead others to a relationship with God. Nevertheless, Craig Detweiler quotes Dürer, who says, “If you can see Christ in me, then perhaps you can begin to see Christ in you as well.” With the racism, sexism, and misogyny that goes on in this world, I have hopes that seeing Christ will transform how we view one another and how we view ourselves. If

⁵ The Young Men's Christian Association of Montreal, *The Making of a Man*, https://archive.org/details/cihm_59393/page/n3/mode/2up.

⁶ Joan R. Harrell, *A Womanist Perspective: Imago Dei in Black and White*, Liturgy 23, no 3. (May 6, 2008): 15-24, (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor and Francis 2008), 15.

one sees Christ in them, it suggests to me that they must come to know Christ and even develop a relationship with Christ for them to continue to see Christ in others and themselves.

In a sense the focus for this project is development. Development of relationships. Development of a relationship with God. Furthermore, the focus is the development of oneself. Therefore, chapter five discusses the Chickering Theory. The Chickering theory utilizes seven vectors of development, which are believed to contributed to the unique identities that people create for themselves. During the project, there will be multiple vectors of Chickering's theory at work at one time. The more vectors of the theory at work will help strengthen the development of the men undergoing the project.

By using Chickering Theory I realize three important things, the theory is for college students, it is not specifically for men, and it is not specifically for African Americans. In spite of, Chickering Theory is useful because it helps center the main focus of development and how each vector of development influence the next. I concluded that by using Chickering Theory it will cause the development process to go far beyond our time shared together during this project time. It will force those that participate in the project to continue further in their development outside of the time of us sharing together.

In chapter six, I summarize my learnings and make conclusions from my project. Within all the papers I have written, I see how each one affects the other concerning this project. Community and development being the essential themes for my project. Each one builds off the other, to help further carry forth the importance and necessity of this project in my current context. In the papers, you will notice I even mention some of the topics of the other paper to help carry more weight to the paper. As I draw further into the

project, I realize this project has a focus on three groups for the participant. The project focuses on the participants self, the participants relationship with other, and the participants relationship with God. By the time the project concludes, the participant should seem some kind of development between two of those groups if not all three.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

On December 19, 2020, I received a call informing me that I had received 70% of votes electing me as the eighth pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in El Paso, Texas. I have never been outside of the city of Chicago to live. I was afforded the opportunity to attend seminary for a year in Washington D. C., and even an internship in Houston, Texas. However, I have never done ministry and lived outside of Chicago for no more than a year. I started as the pastor on February 7, 2021. The only people present for the first service were the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Deacons, and the Interim Pastor. The church called me during the Covid-19 pandemic and had not opened the church up for any members to come. As a result, since my time here, I have been preaching to empty pews. Shiloh Baptist Church is a predominately African-American Baptist Church. The church is in what is Central El Paso. The church is only an hour away from the Mexico and United States border. The church is 111 years old and has a building that is 100 years old. The church being a very traditional church, has struggled to embrace technology during this pandemic. For example, a year ago the church installed new High-Definition cameras and a digital sound board. However, for worship they had set up a tripod on a table with an iPad to present service on Zoom. For music they played YouTube videos or old recordings of the choirs.

The church was established in 1910, and the current building built in the late 1920s. It has only had two location and two buildings. Members believed the first building was too far from town. This would cause the first church split with a church that is still in existence today and not too far from the current location of the church. This church was recognized as our sister church. At one point and time, the current location of Shiloh was considered, "The Black community." However, since then the city had come in and built an expressway and railroad track less than 1000 feet away from our church. This was beneficial at first because the exit to the highway allowed members from the Eastside and Westside to have a direct route to drive to church.

Just a few months before my arrival, the city decided to close the cross-track area by the church for the railroad tracks. Making it extremely difficult to get off the highway and come directly to the church. People would have to go five blocks up just to cross the tracks. The railroad track also produces issues because the freight often runs on Sunday causing an extremely loud horn to be born in the middle of worship. When the expressway was built many of the members moved out of the central El Paso area and moved mostly Northeast and East. Currently, surrounding the community of the church is Hispanics. The building of the expressway also led to their never being a "black community" again. African Americans make up of 3.63% of an almost 700,000 population.

Shiloh Baptist Church has always been known as the bourgeois church. The who's who attended Shiloh. The membership consisted of trailblazers in the education field, medical field, business, political, and even divinity. Shiloh was the first church in El Paso to have a pastor with an earned Doctor of Ministry Degree. Upon my arrival

there were history makers like the Straw family. Mother Straw was the first mother to fight so that her children attended a predominately white grammar and high school. Or like Deaconess Less, she was the first Negro guidance counselor in El Paso. There are a lot of members who were raised in Shiloh. Since Shiloh is all they know they have remained throughout the years. There are a lot of family connections and history in the church. Where families' great grandparents were deacons and trustees. These families were essential in the growth of Shiloh in the 50s through the 70s. Therefore, I also sense that the membership feels as if they have a sense of ownership of the church.

Each pastor left an imprint on the church. However, the last two pastors were very important. Pastor Coward Clump was the sixth pastor of Shiloh and the pastor who held the longest tenure. Under his leadership necessary renovations were made and he made connections with young families, leading to a bloom in the young people's department. Pastor Lang Long was the seventh pastor; and he is my predecessor. Pastor Long served Shiloh for over twenty years until his health began to decline. Pastor Long has Parkinson disease and it started to also effect his speech. Pastor Long would have served Shiloh longer if he could deliver more sermons that would be clear. Every member of Shiloh that is still present either came under Pastor Clump or Pastor Long.

As stated, Shiloh is in El Paso, Texas. It is west Texas, eight hours away from any major city like San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas. It has one college here called University of Texas in El Paso (UTEP), and a community college called El Paso Community College. There is also a major military base located here called the Fort Bliss Military base. Over 35,000 soldiers reside on the Fort Bliss base. El Paso is what you considered to be a transit city. People only come here for a short period of time and then

they leave. Many may retire from the military to make this city the place they retire, but by the time they retire they are well over the age of sixty.

On the other hand, El Paso is expanding. El Paso has grown since the 1970s and continues to expand eastward. Currently, an amazon facility is being built here. The facility will bring over 700 jobs on the first day. From conversations with some young adults in the church and in the city, the reason most of them do not stay in El Paso is because of the struggle to start a career in their field. Texas is a great state and many people have moved from the north to here, but the main location they tend to move to are Houston and Dallas. El Paso lacks any activities to draw young people here. There are concerts every three years. There are no water parks because El Paso is considered a desert city. In fact, El Paso nickname is “The Sun City.” Other folks may refer to EL Paso as mini-Mexico. The church and a few houses that are close to the border are symmetrical to building and houses that are in Mexico. They remind people of Mexico and the landscape of Mexico. There are no restaurants and shopping centers in Central El Paso. Each store, restaurant, and place of business is a Hispanic related or reference place of business. Therefore, the church currently does not receive free advertisement from day-to-day traffic and viewing. In fact, the church is separated by a parking lot from a Hispanic church. Then one block away is a Catholic church. This is significant because most Hispanic main religion is Catholicism. At the same time, Shiloh, upon my arrival, had an order of worship that was similar to that of the Catholic church. They would have Prayer of Repentance and Confession, as well as referring to the Lord’s Supper as the Eucharist.

Although African Americans represent almost four percent of the population in El Paso, there are anywhere between seven to ten African American Baptist affiliated churches. Then on top of that there are almost as nearly as fifty African American churches of all denominations. Therefore, equating to for one black church having 420 black people in the city apart of that church's congregation. Currently, Shiloh has 175 members on roll, but only about seventy-five of them are active. Some of those members are Hispanic and some are Caucasian. Despite the multi-ethnicity already present, Shiloh considers themselves to still be a predominate African American church. In the past, the community where Shiloh is, used to be the upper middle class, it is now middle to low-class community. There are homeless people who have built tents and even a small community under a bridge around the corner from the church. There are abandoned homes that surround the church, as well as commercial buildings and properties that now occupy major land around the church.

Shiloh is the second oldest Black Baptist church in El Paso. They are credited for having many congregants because back then there were not many churches; and there was a deep love and concern for the community. Especially in social justice and equality for all. As stated before, Mother Straw fought hard for her children to attend the predominately white schools in El Paso. Mother Straw helped organize the El Paso Negro Business Association. Due to her efforts, she unselfishly became the first Black person or Black female to serve in many capacities. These capacities would be nothing compared to her seventy-eight years as a member of Shiloh. She was able to experience the past five pastors of Shiloh. She was also very instrumental in the actual keeping up and knowing of the church history.

For almost five years, Pastor Long suffered from his Parkinson disease. With the loss of his voice, also came with the loss of his pastoral authority. When he discovered that he was becoming sick he took a year sabbatical, leaving the Assistant to the Pastor in charge. During Pastor Long's tenure, many of the young ladies in the church begin to stray from the church and have babies out of wedlock. When the church discovered this, they made these young ladies come before the church and "confess their sins." A lot of the members would talk about, spread rumors, and gossip about these young ladies. They talked about their lifestyles and even make fun of the fact that they were pregnant. The mistreatment on these young ladies pushed them away from the church. If there were young ladies who were not pregnant, they saw how the church mistreated their friends that they grew up with, so they too eventually stopped attending. In essence, these young ladies and even some young men experienced church hurt. Therefore, now to ask them to attend virtual church is hard because they feel as if the church owes them an apology.

While also being pregnant, some of these young girls decided to get married to their baby's father. Most of them discovered that these men were abusive both physically and verbally. They were in toxic relationships because some of these men were also accused of being cheaters. Some of these marriages did not last longer than a few months. Remind you that the oldest age that they would marry was the age twenty-one years old. These girls had not lived life fully yet and were getting married. It is their belief that Pastor Long did not stand up for them; and they have resentment towards the church. They felt like the church does not really care about them like they said they do. Many other young people went off to college, I have heard many of the parishioner's state, "when they graduate from high school, they also graduated from the church." Those who

went to college do not come back for any of the breaks. They have not been back, and when I talk to them although they are excited and receptive of a new pastor, the word church or Shiloh turns them into a displeased person.

Research states that the community desires to be a part of a ministry that has warm and friendly encounters. Since I have been there, and we have reopened there have been several visitors that has come and worshipped with us. As they leave, I make sure that I stand by the exit door to thank them for worshipping with us. Many people leave expressing that they felt welcome, or they felt like they are family every time they come. These remarks and statements make me as a pastor very glad because my hope is that we will be a church that is welcoming to all.

One reality I will always live in is dealing with church hurt. Now granted that because of people, there is the strong possibility of still dealing with those who are going to hurt others. However, I believe that a welcoming and friendly environment means that there is conversation that takes place when hurt has occurred. We have in place the hospitality ministry, the ushers, and the first touch ministry. Each ministry is responsible for making sure that those who come on our campuses feel welcomed and if they have a dire need that it is immediately addressed.

The most important thing in this area where my church is located is the need for community. The people in our community want to feel like they belong and have people to support, encourage, and be there for them. They want to attend a church where they can also have friends and family that connect them to the church. This community is not just for them, but for their entire family. They want a family feel church that meets the needs of everyone in their family. Therefore, the church must be able to accommodate

every need of everyone in the family from the oldest to the youngest, from elementary school to graduate school, and from single household to married household.

From a further examination about the future of the city, in the next five years 25% of the population will be between the ages thirty-five to fifty-four.

¹ This is important because in the next five years, I will only be thirty-two, so I will not be included in this essential group of people who will make up majority of El Paso. However, the next two essential groups are the ages five to seventeen representing 20% of the population and then the ages twenty-five to thirty-four which represents 15% of the population. Over 60% of the population will be represented by youth and young adults in El Paso. Therefore, the current makeup of the church must shift to look like the city. The church must move from traditionalism to a contemporary church.²

Being a young pastor, and the youngest pastor that the church has had in its 111 years of existence, the belief is that because I am a young pastor that I will attract younger members to the church. However, were conflict meets is that I am still traditional and “old school.” Therefore, younger people are not always attracted to me. On the other hand, as a young pastor and the members noticing the need for change and innovation, they have been receptive in allowing me to do different things that help transition the church into a more contemporary church.

As we still examine the population, we discover that over the next five years there will be another shift in the population. This shift is now in the population of men. Currently there are 48.36% men in El Paso. In ten years, there will be a 0.33% increase,

¹ Experian Marketing Services, “The ExecutiveInsite Report 2021,” MissionInsite, <http://www.missioninsite.com>.

² Experian Marketing Services, “The ExecutiveInsite Report 2021.”

while at the same time there will be a 0.33% decrease in the population of women in El Paso.³ As more men populate the city, the hope is that I can attract more men to start attending the church. Like many other churches, women are the majority representation in the church. We have women preachers and deacons. I would even say for Shiloh that there is one man for every ten women of the church. If there is going to be a shift in the city between women and men, then there must be a shift in the church population.

Let me express that I do not have an issue with women in leadership roles. However, I am very clear that families can become better stabilized, and communities can become safer when there is a male presence. Therefore, if this is true about the communities and families, what type of impact can male presence and leadership play as it relates to the church? I grew up without my father being active in my life. My maternal grandfather played a huge role in my life. However, I still desire that my father was present in my life. My grandfather taught me how to be a man of honor and lead by example. There is a need in the community and in the church to see men in leadership roles and positions both in their homes and in the community as well as the church. As a young man leading a church there is a need for other young man to step up into leadership roles.

There is no doubt that there are young men who can become leaders in our church, because many have already taken leadership roles by being a part of the army. Fort Bliss is the home to over 20,000 military personnel as well as 7,200 civilians. Majority of the military personnel are men. It is no doubt that men can be a strong presence and can be good leaders, even as they lead our country and sacrifice their lives

³ Experian Marketing Services, "The ExecutiveInsite Report 2021."

for our country. Therefore, it is interesting that even in a military city that we lack leadership from men. However, I believe it is not because of the church just as much as it deals with the lifestyle and choices of the men.

When I look at my context, several of the young ladies that have been married, married men who were apart of the military. These same women have either already been divorced or are going through a divorce currently. While in conversation with one of them, she stated how the military taught her husband how to be cutthroat with his emotions. She stated because in the army they will probably have to kill a lot of people to protect themselves and the country, they are trained not to have or show emotions and feelings. Therefore, in their relationship with their spouse and other family members they are emotionally detached from them which causes friction in the family.

I make mention of this because I think most times when it relates to men, especially the black men, we are taught how to be emotionally detached. We are taught as a black man not to show or have emotions. Therefore, for black men to be further persuaded by the military to be emotionally detached, I can imagine it causes major issues in their families. Therefore, there must be a focus on helping the black men to personally grow into understanding how to deal with their emotions in a productive and right way. I believe that if we are going to reach men, we must minister to the total person of the men, which means dealing with their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Ministering to the total well-being of the men will allow them to experience personal growth and help them become the men that God is calling them to be in their homes, communities, and especially in the church.

The bigger question that needs answering is how I can get men to start coming to church overall. It is one thing to minister to the men, but the issue is we lack men's presence in our church. In the past, several men of our church have testified that the reason they started coming to church is because of their wife. One testified that his wife had been coming for several years before he started coming. The only reason he started coming is because the pastor would often call the house, not to speak to the wife, but to speak to him and check on him. This action for the pastor intrigued this person to come and check out the church and see what this pastor was about. Another testified about how he came periodically. However, he did not become a member of the church until his wife was diagnosed with stage four cancer. After she was diagnosed, the pastor and his wife were at the hospital every day. When the husband could not be there, either the pastor or his wife was there to be with their member. The gentleman testified that their display of love and care for his wife during her sickness intrigued him to start coming to church. As a result, he would serve on the usher board and then became a deacon.

These different scenarios show how the previous pastor was able to encounter and draw men into the church. However, I believe it will not be as easy for me as it was for him. Most millennial men have had a bad experience with the church or no experience at all with the church. Therefore, the way I encounter and draw them into the church must be different. I think one of the factors that must play into effect is that we become an intergenerational church. In other words, Shiloh must become a church for all generations. The issue is what does that look like? How many generations make up the membership of Shiloh? How can we be both a traditional and contemporary church in our music, teaching, and even my preaching?

If the focus is going to be on millennials and seeing how most of them have no history or experience in the church, then engaging them means doing so outside of the church first before they come inside the church. For example, having a Young Adult Bible Study at IHOP. Another example will be, having a poetry night and renting out a venue for the evening. This event will be for those who would like to have an intimate date night or for those who simply like poetry. If we use it for date night, those who are married will be able to attend and we can display and use that avenue to show the church cares about families and family values.

For many millennials, they grew up in a single parent home. Their father was not around; therefore, my fear is that they will repeat what they have seen and not be there for their children when time comes. One of the best things that the church can help implement is breaking that generational curse. Helping millennial men filter through their feelings from being in a one parent household. Also, I think there should be a focus on teaching them how to become men. Since most millennial men grew up being raised by their mother, their mother did their best in teaching them how to be the best person they can be. However, I believe that they need men, specifically men who are leaders in the church, how to be men in the world. Finally, I believe it is the responsibility of the church to help these same men become leaders in the city, community, culture, and church that they are a part of.

I think one of the main focuses that the church should focus on as it relates to black men is mental health. Unfortunately, black men are taught to not show their emotions or that being emotional is not manly. Therefore, when black boys cry even from an early age, they would be told to “man up.” As a result, they are convinced that to show

emotions means they are not a man. As it relates to my context, I pastor in a city where majority of the residents in the city are either in the army or have retired from the army. Therefore, as I think about men's mental health, I also think about how in the army they teach their personnel that they must not have emotions in the army. This is taught because they realize that there will come times where they must kill people and the enemy and if they have emotions, they might feel sorry for those who they are fighting. In return, those in the military must literally become "cut-throat." Having no consideration on who they are killing or defending their country for.

If we are going to address mental health issues among black men as a church, then we must include in it the reality that some may have childhood trauma and teaching that must be dealt with. We must deal with how they became emotionless. Focusing on trying to convey to them that they can have Jesus and a therapist too. It is my personal belief that the reason why there are so many divorces and trouble in the marriage is because childhood trauma has not been dealt with. Furthermore, there are issues with marriages because the black men have not been healed by going to a psychiatrist and dealt in a healthy way with their emotions and feelings. The reality is that as it relates to black men not many people are talking about or helping them deal with mental health issues. I think recent years have shown us the importance of dealing with and talking about mental health issues in the church. It is no longer something we can just pray about, pray over, and pray on. However, professional help should be sought and taught that it is needed for personal growth and wholeness.

I believe that the church has a bad reputation as it relates to how to properly deal with mental health illness. The church of age would treat mental health illness as a

demon. Therefore, they would pray over people and even would try to commit exorcism. As a result, I see in the present day that people are fearful of going to the therapist. It is the belief that to have a therapist means that you are psychotic or “wrong” with them. They do not understand that seeing a therapist is needed just to filter through what is going on in their life and in this world. After everything we have been through these past few years, I have discovered that a therapist can help people deal with what they are faced with every day. This includes discovering how they deal with the pandemic, president, protest, police brutality, and other pressing concerns that happens.

When I reflect on my own personal life, I realize that some of the old church teaching kept me from living a whole life. When my grandfather, uncle, and mother died I did not properly grieve. As a result, when I could not do anything else during a pandemic, all I could do was grieve. My grief allowed me to detach from people because I thought they did not understand what I was going through. I had been traumatized by the fact of seeing both my mother and grandfather dead immediately after their death. The young people in my church have also gone through traumatizing events that have played an effect in their faith and relationship with God. This is why many of them although raised in the church, have strayed away from the church because of their unanswered questions about theodicy. Some of these traumatizing events have been the loss of their parents or abuse from family members. As a result, they struggle believing in a system of a church family that loves them because their own personal family did not show love compassion or care towards them.

There is a correlation between the church and I because the young adults that are the same age as I also experience foster care. My mother was unable to take care of my

sisters and I when we were younger because of her addiction to drugs. My oldest sister's father passed away, and my father did not claim my second oldest sister and myself. As a result, the government had no other choice but to place us in the system. It is only because of the grace of God and the love of my grandparents that instead of being foster care children and living in foster homes, they took us in. However, I was and still am a foster child.

The young adults at Shiloh, most of them were also foster children. From what I am told, there was a member who was a foster care agent. Since this was her job, she made sure that the children of cases she worked on found good homes. These children's parents were members of Shiloh. However, the families that they came from were very much broken. Their biological parents were drug addicts, drug dealers, pimps, rapists, and or gang members. As a result, being placed in foster care in this different setting of course some would resist while others would adapt.

Most of these young people were not as fortunate as I was. They had to be separated from their biological brothers and sisters. Some had to endure going through terrible foster care homes and being with people who only took them in for the money from the government. As foster care children, you never feel welcome and a part of anything because if your own family did not want you then why would anyone else welcome you in. Therefore, many of the foster care children have self-doubts about themselves and they do not take rejection well. Therefore, when it comes to interacting with the young adults, I must be very careful about how I interact and exchange conversation with them about their life and about different problems that they may be

going through. It is also hard for them to cultivate healthy and reciprocal friendships and relationships.

El Paso host the military base, Fort Bliss. Fort Bliss is one of the largest military bases in the United States. As a results, the reason many African Americans live in El Paso is because they were stationed here by the military. About 90% of the people in Shiloh have a military connection. What this mean is that either they, their parents, or spouse were a part of the military at some point. As a result, I have a lot of members who in the military were major sergeants, so they know how to lead and give orders, but not many are good at following orders.

My grandfather served in the army as a Master Sergeant. As a result, I see some correlations between the members and my grandfather. Two major concerns are first being aware of reality and then second them not addressing their Post Trauma Stress Disorders (PTSD). I observed my grandfather a lot when I was younger and now that I am an adult, I can honestly say there was a disconnect with emotions from my grandfather. Now of course I have seen him cry, smile, and laugh. However, in worship there seem to be a disconnect of enlightenment. As if the word of God was not as interested, or the preacher was not good. There was no emotions or excitement shown during worship. It was to the point I remember one pastor out of the two pastor I sat under at my old church, told my grandfather that he would like to see a change in the responses from the deacons' board during the preaching moment. Just a couple of months ago, I had to do the same thing to my deacons' ministry. I believe that leadership is not just called to lead the church in the business aspect, but also spiritually. As a result, we must lead by showing an example to other people how they are supposed to act, behave,

and respond while in worship. I imagine just like I was watching my grandfather, there were others as well that was watching. So, people are watching, and as leaders we must lead them in worship by worshipping with both visible and verbal actions.

Secondly, there is the lack of addressing Post Trauma Stress Disorders in the church. My room was right next to my grandparents' room. Every night I was either waken up by or heard my grandfather screaming. Every night in his sleep, he would have flashbacks to his time in the Korean War. As a result, he would begin to yell, scream, and even fight as if he was back in the war. The only thing that would stop him was my grandmother yelling his name so that he could wake up. This happened over and over, but I do not ever remember as a family discussing this or even my grandfather seeking help for his PTSD. It is the same way with many in my church. I have had conversation with many people that know they are suffering from PTSD. There are little triggers that set off their PTSD moments and reactions. However, it seems as if PTSD is just normalized. It is so normal that people feel as if there is nothing, they can do about it. There is the belief that there are no resources or help they can get for it. Unfortunately, the result is that many members suffer through it.

After understanding my church context and doing the research on the future community of my church, I can conclude, there must be a focus on men since there will be an increase in the men's population here in El Paso. I can also conclude that there must be a focus on creating community since their childhood essential did not have community. They grew up in foster care and they were separated from their biological family, so the only family and friends were those who were a part of their spiritual family and community. Lastly, there must be a focus on developing these young men. The lack

of a father presence in their childhood means it can be inferred that no one taught them how to be a real man. As a result, it will benefit them completely if they are taught development strategies and given resources that can help them become strong men that can lead their homes with integrity. Especially helping them no how to be an emotionally, spiritually, and healthy individuals in their homes and for their own benefit.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

It was the Thomas Paine that once said, “These are the times that try men’s souls.”¹ That has been my reality. Out of the almost thirty years of life that I have been blessed with, I have been tried. From dealing with deaths, losses, fake friends, and even family drama. There is a lot that have been trying about my life. As a result of being placed in a shut down at the beginning of a pandemic, it caused one to do reflecting and deal with that which probably had not been dealt with. Therefore, by September 2020, I discovered myself at a breaking point because I had not healed from hurt and pain.

My undealt with past caused me to find myself at a place where I thought about suicide. I thought about even hurting others because of the hurt they had caused me. It was at this breaking point I had to decide to either find help or do wrong. I decided I was going to find help. I imagine that since this pandemic has gone on for two years, there have been a lot of people trying to decide whether they are going to find help or hurt themselves. It is not an easy decision, but it is a necessary decision.

In the African American community, mental health is not a conversation that is always talked about. In fact, in the African American church we are just told to pray for people. Unfortunately, ignoring and downplaying mental health does not work for me

¹ Thomas Paine, “Thomas Paine: American Crisis,” US History, <https://www.ushistory.org/paine/crisis/c-01.htm>.

anymore. I must bring awareness to the subject because the community is suffering from it, especially African American males. African American males are told from a very young age not to show emotions, to not communicate, and to be “strong.” As a result, that same teaching sticks with them and they grow up to be nonchalant man. Their nonchalant attitude causes trouble in their marriage because they do not communicate with their wives. The children begin to suffer because they feel as if their dad does not care about them or their life situation. This teaching and attitude have a domino effect on the household.

My hope is to just bring awareness to mental health issues. I desire that the African American man begin to take their mental state of mind more serious. To do that I want to provide them with a safe space just for men to come just to talk and hang out. This safe space will allow them to have conversation centered around life, how it is being an African American man in today’s world, the challenges of being a husband and father, and life lessons they have picked up. This safe space will also be for the purpose of making connections with others.

I desire that these men become lifelong friends, mentors, and mentees, but that they will help each other outside of our meetings. As the only boy, now since that my grandfather is gone, I understand how lonely it can get without having family and friends. There is a need of that companionship and relationship. Furthermore, I want these men to develop stronger relationships with God. I want to see their spiritual lives developed. Where they get connected to churches and serve God through a local church. The desire is to use this session not to just focus on the world perspective, but to provide for them a spiritual connection as well. Where these men can become balanced both mentally and

spiritually. I want to see these men experience salvation and become disciples of Jesus the Christ.

The focus of my project is with men who are between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five who may be dealing with trying to balance their lives and need help dealing with their mental health. We understand that mental health is very important and has become more relevant in our day and time. However, it is still a subject that the church does not talk about or deal with. As a result, we must draw our attention to Holy scripture and determine what the Bible has to say about dealing with mental illness. More specifically where do we see men dealing with mental illness in the Bible.

Upon research, I recalled the gospel text of Mark chapter five, verses one through twenty. My focus would be on verse two through fifteen. It states:

And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid (Mk. 5:2-15).²

² Biblical citations in the document are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, Mark 5.

There is so much to unpack from this text. Let us begin with comparing the text to the modern-day belief of the church. Often when we discuss mental health issues, we relate it to the person is just dealing with demons and they just must “pray.” Anything dealing with mental health like depression, people are told to just pray about it. Some are even told they have the devil in them. Therefore, there was the need for exorcisms and people brought in for prayer so that others can pray the demons out. I believe that we have seen a shift in our history and have begun to take mental health issues more seriously. Nevertheless, I must highlight that because even in this scriptural text we see a demon possessed man who is dealing with mental health illness. Likewise, we see Jesus in a way performs an exorcist and it is not until the exorcist is completed that the Bible says this man is “in his right mind.”

There are a few things the text highlights for us about people who deal with mental health issues. Notice first the living arrangements of this man. The text says, he lived in tombs among dead people. One theologian refers to it as a place of uncleanness.³ E. P. Gould states, “These were natural or artificial excavations in the rocks, frequently cut laterally in the hills, and often left uncovered, which, like other caves, would be resorts for wild men and beasts.”⁴ This is interesting that the only place wild men felt comfortable is going to a cave. What theologians do not discuss is if they go to the cave for safety or for help. If they went for safety, did they not feel safe anymore if people

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 229–230.

⁴ Ezra Palmer Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark*. International Critical Commentary (New York, NY: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 88.

tried to help? There are missing elements to why did wild men choose caves to go to as an escape.

The scripture also tells us about the man's community. The scripture says those who use to be his family and friends because he is now wild, they try to restrain him. They do not help him. They hurt him more because they try to restrain him with shackles and chains. According to R. A. Cole:

The medical treatment given to this man was that commonly still used in many parts of the world today: he was loaded with chains, in a vain attempt to curb his inner turmoil by outward restraint. Not surprisingly, this proved quite futile (4). It was also probably part of his 'treatment' to drive him away from inhabited areas, to find in graveyards on desolate hillsides his 'isolation block'. But isolation, whether self-chosen or enforced by others (as in the case of lepers), meant only that the destructive force of evil, instead of turning outwards in outbreaks of violence, vented itself on the patient, in acts of senseless self-torture, as stated here (5).⁵

Cole highlights that because of the fact they were trying to restrain this man, it leads him to a place of isolation. In this place of isolation, he begins to self-torture himself. The scripture says, he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. I appreciate Cole's observation and connection between isolation and the man's self-torture. I do believe that in a lot of ways when men feel isolated and alone, they begin to find themselves in a place where they harm themselves or the thought about harming themselves. The feeling of isolation is the reason why many think about committing suicide.

This idea is supported and even further looked at by R. L. Cooper when he states:

Mark painted a picture of a man in a pitiable state. He could not live with his family, so he lived alone (or with another demon-possessed person, according to Matthew) in a graveyard. He was strong enough to break the chains that bound

⁵ R. A. Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 158–159.

him, but not strong enough to expel the demons from his body. His shrieking was heard throughout the countryside. He was even violent toward himself and cut himself with stones. He was naked and most likely covered with scars. Even after the Fall, the image of God, the *imago dei*, resided in humans. Demons, in this case and others, did what they could to destroy the image of God.⁶

Cooper highlights for us that sometimes mental illness can take place so that the *imago dei* that resides in all of us can be destroyed. I wrestle with this because when I examine our world, I see so many ways of how the *imago dei* in humans is under attack. Our image of God in ourselves is even more attacked when we deal with mental illness because we can often feel as if we are not worthy. However, the image of God in us is important because it reminds us of our differences; but furthermore, how God is different and unique. If demons destroy the image of God, it confuses us on the reality of God. I believe for centuries now that we have become confused about the image of God.

J. D. Grassmick agrees with Cooper by writing:

Elaborately describes his pathetic condition. He lived in the tombs (an outcast); he was uncontrollable for no one could ... subdue (from *damazō*, "to tame a wild animal") him, not even with fetters for his feet or a chain for his hands. He went about night and day shrieking wildly and cutting himself with sharp stones, perhaps in a demonic form of worship. Such behavior shows that demon possession is not mere sickness or insanity but a desperate satanic attempt to distort and destroy God's image in man.⁷

Grassmick suggest that when people deal with mental illness it is a satanic attempt to distort God's image in man. Mental illness is caused to provide a negative view of who God is to us and who God is in us. Could it be that when people deal with mental illness they are dealing with trying to likewise understand God and who God is?

⁶ R. L. Cooper, *Mark*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 84.

⁷ J. D. Grassmick, *Mark*, in J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 122–123.

While the people in the community did not help this man, in fact they harm him more, by the time we get to verse six, the scripture says that Jesus is in the distance and this man sees him. It is Cole again that says it like this, “It was in the failure of all human methods that Jesus acted decisively.”⁸ Jesus shows up to the scene and Jesus does not come with chains and shackles to help restrain this man. In fact, I imagine Jesus comes to help set this man free from his mental illness. How does Jesus help this mentally ill man, by having a conversation with this man? Jesus shows up that sometimes the best way to deal with people who are dealing with mental illness is to provide community and conversation with them. While those in the city were trying to restrain this man, if they would have tried to have a conversation with him things could have gone a different way. This was no normal conversation or dialogue; it was a conversation with authority. R. T. France says, “Mark’s aside explains that this was not just an assumption: the imperfect tense indicates that Jesus had already taken the initiative, and that v. 7 represents one side of a protracted dialogue, with the demons trying to resist the exorcist’s authority.”⁹ Jesus in this dialogue with the demon possessed man remains his full authority. Jesus can have this conversation because of Jesus’ authority and control over demons. It suggests that those who are dealing with mental illness may not be the best suitable person for others consult with. There must be someone who has control over their own mental illnesses. I am not saying that it is impossible to be there for others if you have mental illness yourself, but I would argue that there must be someone who has control over their own

⁸ Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 158.

⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 229–230.

issues first. In other words, I would suggest that one who wants to help others with their illness must be one who is going to a therapist themselves.

During this controlled conversation, Jesus asks this man his name. The man response was, “my name is Legion, for we are many.” We do not get the man’s actual name, but we do get some insight about the man. The question must be raised, why does Jesus ask this man his name. What was the purpose of this question? R. T. France suggest that:

It is often assumed that this was a necessary part of Jesus’ exorcistic ‘technique’, but Mark gives no hint that that was its purpose; neither here nor anywhere else in the gospels does Jesus use the name as part of a formula of exorcism. Rather the function of the name in this narrative is to provide a graphic indication of the multiple possession involved in this case, which in turn will explain the following incident with the pigs. The significance of the ‘name’ need not focus on the actual number of troops in a Roman legion (theoretically 6,000; contrast the number of pigs, specified as 2,000 in v. 13), so much as on the character of a legion as a large body of troops acting in concert; Jesus is not confronted by one demon, but by an army of them.¹⁰

France assumes there is no need for the name of this man. All it does it highlight the rest of the story for us why 2,000 pigs are possessed and then later drowned in the sea.

However, I disagree with France statement and position, I believe there is a more significant reason why Jesus in this conversation ask this man for his name.

Upon more study, I am intrigued with what R. L. Cooper highlights for his readers. Cooper states:

Jesus commanded the demon to identify itself. Cole suggests that this was not for the demon’s sake but for the man’s and those gathered around. Confession releases shame and enables healing to happen. Cole states that “in the Bible, *name* stands for ‘nature’: so the man was virtually asked to confess the nature of the powers of evil by which he was enslaved. His reply is not only a confession of human impotence, but a vivid expression of the might and destructive force of the demonic powers by which he was gripped. (Cole, *Mark*, p. 98). The word legion

¹⁰ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 229–230.

may have differing meanings. Stock, following Jeremias, believes that the word should be translated “soldier” because the demons were a great host and were waging war upon the man.”¹¹

Cooper says that the statement of this man’s name is connected to the releasing of shame and beginning of healing. When the man can face his reality and talk about it, this is when healing happens. It is the reality that people, especially men, do not face their reality. We are told not to show emotions and as a result we do not deal with what we are going through. We cannot expect healing if we are not willing to have conversations and confessions. It is not until Jesus is able or recognize the source that Jesus can deal with the issue.

Frances put it like this, “It is with the demons, not with the man, that Jesus must deal; only after the exorcism is complete will Jesus address the man in his own right.”¹² Jesus identifies the issue or mental health problem and then he is able to address it. Although I do not make the conclusion that mental health is demonic related, I must highlight something that J. R. Edwards states about this text. J. R. Edwards says, “The demoniac is not a split personality but a multiple or shattered personality equal to the number and force of a Roman legion occupying him. “Legion” adds another militant facet to the demoniac’s violent history and is a chilling reminder of the number, power, and intention of the demons.”¹³ Edwards highlights for us the possibility of this man’s mental illness. Edwards talks about split personality. When we talk about split personality, we also think about a person who is bipolar. Bipolar is indeed a mental

¹¹ Cooper, *Mark*, 85.

¹² France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 229–230.

¹³ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 157.

illness that affects about forty-five million people worldwide.¹⁴ Edwards is the first theologian that I have come across that sees this man not just demon possessed, but one who is dealing with mental illness. I think this is so significant because recognizing this man's situation as having split personalities is a fresh perspective that helps us better understand this man now.

The Bible says that Jesus deals with the man's split personality by dealing with the demons he possessed. According to the text, these 2,000 demons find a herd of swine, entered them, and then the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. The text then tells us that the swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what had happened. J. D. Grassmick makes a good observation when he says, "The herdsmen tending the pigs fled in fear and reported this startling event in the town (probably Gersa; cf. v. 1) and the surrounding countryside."¹⁵ It was the herdsmen fear that brought the people together to see what had happened. These herdsmen probably did not want to be accused of killing their master's pigs; therefore, they had to go spread the word about what had really happened before they got blamed.

We are not told what they told the people, but J. R. Edwards states, "The report summons people from the surrounding area to see what has happened. And they see something quite astounding: the infamous demoniac is in a wholly altered state, "sitting there, dressed and in his right mind." That is a picture of discipleship and salvation: a

¹⁴ World Health Organization, "Mental Disorders," World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>.

¹⁵ Grassmick, *Mark*, 122–123.

restored individual sitting at the feet of Jesus.”¹⁶ Edwards says that their report is what summons the people to come see what happened. When they arrive, they saw something that they have never seen before. They saw this man clothed and in his right mind. Edwards highlights for us that this is a picture of discipleship and salvation. I appreciate this observation because ultimately, I desire that this project will help men to disciple one another and be disciplined themselves. Most of all, my conclusion is that because if men have a safe space to have conversation about their lives, then they will ultimately develop a better relationship with God. Some may experience salvation for the first time if this is the reality. It is important to note the definition Edward use for salvation and discipleship because I believe this is the focus of this project. Edward defines salvation and discipleship as a restored “individual sitting at the feet of Jesus.”¹⁷ I desire those men who will participate in my project will become restored whole and their desire will be to continue to have a relationship with Jesus by staying close to Him.

Notice what the text says, it says they saw him that was possessed with the devil. There is something unique about what the words used here. K. S. Wuest looks and in his observation, we are told:

The particular word for “see” used here is “to view attentively, take a view of, survey, to consider, to ascertain or find out by seeing.” It is used, not of an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at a thing with interest and attention. It would be used of a general officially reviewing or inspecting an army. Thus, the word speaks of a critical, searching investigation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 159.

¹⁷ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 159.

¹⁸ K. S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 105-106.

In other words, when the people see him, they are investigating him; and they find clear evidence of change and transformation. I believe that is so important because I desire that there will be clear evidence of transformation among the men in this project. The evidence is clear because he is sitting. This is a comparison to the inability to restrain him prior to meeting Jesus. They see him clothed. This is another comparison to when he was naked howling and cutting himself. Lastly, they see him in his right mind. This man is no longer possessed by 2,000 demons, which was making him have a split personality or making him deal with a type of bipolar disorder. This man's life was transformed; and he is sitting at the feet of Jesus. When Jesus gets ready to leave, he makes a strong plea to go with Jesus. This man does this because he wants a close relationship with Jesus.

Again, evaluating the evidence of transformation, the text says he is sitting and clothed. Why does the text highlight these two specific things? The text could have ended by just saying the demons left him and he was healed. Instead, the text is clear that he is sitting and clothed. Cooper provides insight when he informs us:

This man was now calm, dressed, and rational. Stock mentions the man now being clothed and notes how clothing lends identity to a person (Stock, *Mark*, p. 168). For example, in the parable of the good Samaritan, those who passed by the man could not tell who he was because he was naked. He might have been a Gentile. There was no way to know since he had been stripped of his clothes by the thieves. Clothing also lends dignity. During Jesus' passion, they stripped his clothes off as a way of mocking him and taking away his dignity.¹⁹

Cooper draws two points clothes was connected to his identity. The reason the people were able to see this man transformation is because they saw his new identity within the fact he was now clothed. It suggests that this man while naked, identity was the fact, he was wild and out of control. As a result, to see him now clothed represents a

¹⁹ Cooper, *Mark*, 86.

new identity for him. Then Cooper says clothes also is connected to dignity. This man's self-worth had increased because he was now clothed. When people are dealing with mental illness and suicide most time, they are also dealing with the fact they have low self-worth or low self-esteem. This is further evident then why he was naked.

Nonetheless, when Jesus heals him, he is now clothed.

Notice he is sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. Therefore, I am drawn to the text when we think about and discuss mental health. Nowhere else does it states that somebody after an encounter with Jesus finds themselves in their right mind. Copper tells us though the significant of this man being in his right mind. Cooper shares:

In his right mind is a participle in the Greek. It is a verb that means, "to be of sound mind, to exercise self-control, to curb one's passions." This last meaning was in classical Greek, as it is in New Testament Greek, the predominating usage of the word. Trench speaks of the word as habitual self-government with its constant rein on all the passions and desires. Not only is sanity returned to the demoniac, but self-control.²⁰

Cooper makes a great point that he did not need people restraining him, but he now had self-government. He now had the ability to manage his emotions and actions better than before. Cooper also says this term in his right mind deals with sanity and self-control.

Where he was at one point insane to others, he now takes on the position and posture of being sane. Where at one point this man wanted to harm himself and others, after time with Jesus he is now in place of sanity and self-control. He does not do what he had done before and does not have the same thoughts as he use to have. Cooper stated that this term connects to this man becoming sane suggest that this man was dealing with mental illness.

²⁰ Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, 105-106.

There is something else we must examine in this text. We must look at the reaction of the people. Remember the people who come to investigate him are the same people that make up the community he used to be a part of before being possessed. These people are who he considered to be family and close friends. Therefore, their reaction and response are significant for this man. The text says in verse fifteen that they were afraid. Instead of being astonished, excited, or even celebrating, the text says they were afraid.

It is interesting to me that out of all the emotions that the people had they were afraid. It brings attention to the severity of his situation. Even a healing from Jesus does not change their emotion because their focus is on the fact on this man situation. Matthew Henry says:

The report of all this dispersed through the country immediately. They that *fed the swine*, hastened to the owners, to give an account of their charge, v. 14. This drew the people together, to see what was done: and, 1. When they saw how wonderfully the poor man was cured, they hence conceived a *veneration for Christ*, v. 15. They saw him that was *possessed with the devil*, and knew him well enough, by the same token that they had many a time been frightened at the sight of him; and were now as much surprised to see him *sitting clothed and in his right mind*; when Satan was cast out, he came to himself, and was his own man presently.²¹

Matthew Henry says that just like they had been fearful when he is possessed, they now find him in his right mind, and they are still fearful. Their fear was not one that they had for Jesus, but it was one that had come because of their history with this man. According to Matthew, there was a sense of worship and adoration for Jesus. Nonetheless, there remain a fear for this man. Another theologian says it like this, “They saw the former demoniac sitting there, dressed (cf. Luke 8:27) and in his right mind, rational and self-controlled (contrast Mark 5:3–5). So complete was the transformation that the

²¹ M. Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1787.

townspeople were afraid (awed; cf. 4:41).”²² It is a reminder that this man’s experiences a transformation and yet his transformation is not celebrated. I believe the reason why a lot of black men or black people in general do not seek help or go to therapy because of the fear of being transformed and how people will respond to their transformation. I can further argue that people get teased when others feel like they have been outgrown or somebody has become better than them.

Theologians argue that their fear is what makes them drive Jesus out of the city. According to verse sixteen and seventeen, “And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.” Grassmick believes that this “detail Mark emphasized to show that this economic loss (not the man) was the people’s major concern.”²³ I think their fear and concern about their finances was the reason why they forced Jesus out. The fear of finances is important especially in our present day. Many do not seek therapy because they cannot afford therapy, especially in low economic communities. It is my belief that therapy should become free to all especially now since we are all dealing with this pandemic that has affected our mental stability. Many have been alone during this pandemic, fearful of what is going to happen or if they are going to catch covid. Since there is so much that affects their mental stability and even the worry about their finances, it is best that everyone is given the opportunity to have a therapist for free.

²² Grassmick, *Mark*, 123.

²³ Grassmick, *Mark*, 123.

Lastly, I do not think this would be a successful exegetical chapter until we take an examination of Jesus and try to understand why Jesus does what Jesus does. Jesus could have decided to try and restrain the men just like the others in the city. Jesus could have ignored the men and not have a conversation with the men. Remember the men was a danger to others and himself as he bruised himself. R. A. Cole says, “Unlovable though the man was, Jesus loved and pitied him.”²⁴ Cole reminds us that when we read this text, we are reminded about the everlasting love of Jesus. Jesus continues to show compassion to people and their situation because Jesus loves them. The people just left him in the cave to deal with his issues, and they tried to stay as far as possible away from him. On the other hand, Jesus goes in the cave and have conversation with him. Jesus does with the people who the man probably considered family and friends did not do. Jesus invites this man to begin a transformational lifestyle.

As a result, according to Warren Wiersbe:

The swineherds did not want to be blamed for the loss of the pigs, so they immediately ran to tell the owners what had happened. When the owners arrived at the scene, they were afraid as they beheld the dramatic changes that had taken place in the two men. Instead of running around naked, the men were clothed, seated, and in their right minds. They were new creatures! (2 Cor. 5:17).²⁵

This man becomes a new creature, a new person because of his encounter and experience with Jesus. No longer dealing with multiple personalities or a bipolar disease. This man finds himself in a better lifestyle both spiritually and mentally. Allowing him to become a

²⁴ R. A. Cole, *Mark*, in D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, eds., *New Bible Commentary: Twenty-First Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 959.

²⁵ W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 126.

better person and allowing people to see a wonderful transformation like no other take place.

Wiersbe's interpretation is one that pictures Jesus as compassionate. On the other hand, Cole presents a different argument about why Jesus helps this demon possessed man. Cole states that, "It was in the failure of all human methods that Jesus acted decisively."²⁶ There are two things to note, Cole make mention first that the humans from the city had failed. It is not clear if Cole is referencing how they had failed in restraining or if they failed to properly help this demon possessed man to become better. Either way Cole says that they have failed. The failure of humans is important in this text because I think we fail as humans when we do not encourage each other to get a therapist and be aware of our mental health. There is failure of human when we do not take mental health seriously.

The next thing Cole points out though is that Jesus acted decisively. Cole makes it sound as if Jesus only healed the demon possessed man because Jesus had to heal him. Cole does not suggest that Jesus is moved with compassion or has love for this man, but instead that Jesus just acts as a person who goes around and heals whoever Jesus encounters. That Jesus was first convinced by the man that the man needed Jesus to heal him. This is against what theologians have posted out because even before Jesus have a conversation with the demons or man, it suggests Jesus had already started performing the exorcist on the demon possessed man. As a result, the demons started the conversation with Jesus in verse seven.

²⁶ Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 158.

Nonetheless, I agree with Wiersbe's interpretation of the text. Jesus is moved with compassion and Jesus have love for this man that Jesus does not want to see him suffer any longer with this mental illness. Wiersbe says more when he states:

What did Jesus Christ do for these men? To begin with, He graciously came to them in love, and even went through a storm to do it. Some think that the storm itself may have been satanic in origin, since Jesus used the same words to calm the sea as He did to cast out demons (compare Mark 1:25 and 4:39). Perhaps Satan was trying to destroy Jesus, or at least prevent Him from coming to the men who needed Him. But nothing could stop the Lord from coming to that graveyard and bringing deliverance to those men. Not only did Jesus come to them, but He spoke to them and permitted them to speak to Him. The citizens of that area avoided the two demoniacs, but Jesus treated them with love and respect. He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).²⁷

Wiersbe repeatedly hangs on the fact that Jesus involves himself in this situation because of his love for this man. Jesus' love and need to heal this man allows Jesus to come through storms just so that Jesus can get to this man to heal him. Jesus' love allows Jesus to see this man beyond the demons. In fact, theologians argue that Jesus entire conversation is with the demons until the man is in his right mind. As a result, Jesus sees beyond the demons and see this man, and his love for this man does not want this man to continue to deal with being demon possessed or for this man to deal with a mental illness. Wiersbe also points out what we believe that Jesus loves them because Jesus is love. It is a part of the nature of Jesus to love people and this love is the love that Jesus shows as he heals him.

²⁷ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 125–126.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

When we think about self-care, most times it speaks of when women take a day for themselves. This day may include going shopping, getting their nails and feet done, going to the gym, going to get a massage. We rarely ever hear about self-care for men. Even if we ask men what they do for self-care they would find themselves unsure. The reason behind this is because we rarely have moments and times where we take care of ourselves. We must take care of our family, our friends, our business or occupations, and the list can go on. As a result, we ignore our feelings and ignore taking time for ourselves.

In my project, I focus on young men who struggle with finding community and having conversation about their life. My project is centered around creating a “man cave” where men between the ages eighteen to thirty-five can come together to a certain place just to hang out, but most importantly talk about what they are experiencing in their everyday life. It is my hope by sharing their experiencing with other men their age they can find friendship and advice to help them get through life difficulties. Furthermore, my hope is they will begin to develop a relationship with Christ that will lead to salvation and or discipleship. From this perspective they will begin to attend and serve in the local church which will cause an increase in male membership, but also encourage families to join and become a part of our church.

If this project is successful, because of the presence of man, research says, they will also bring their families. The desire for our church is to reach, gather, and become a family church. Nonetheless, it starts with the men. We will not be able to reach the family if we alienate the men from our church. One of the focuses when it comes to men is their mental health. Men do not have a safe space where they can go to deal with their mental health. Women do not always seem to relate to them, and there could be a lack of communication and understanding between the two of them. Therefore, I want to provide a space where the men can go to find understanding and begin a healing process because they have properly dealt with their emotions. This could mean it is a place where they deal with both personal and social challenges in their life. The goal is to assist in finding a community where they can get the necessary help.

When we look through history, we discover that when the Young Men Christian Association, YMCA, was founded it was founded on trying to create a community where young men addressed social challenges. However, when we look through their history there has been a major shift from its original purpose. Furthermore, the YMCA is no longer just for young men but there is also now a Young Women Christian Association, YWCA. When we observe these changes, we realize that YMCA is no longer a community that can help men with their social challenges. We also must take into consideration the history that the YMCA has with the African American community. Are African American men welcome and feel comfortable being a part of the YMCA? The YMCA is a Christian association, however, how did the YMCA effect the church? Did the YMCA contribute to the growth of the church or did the men replace the church with

their attendance at the YMCA? Did the church have any benefits because of the activation of the YMCA?

I choose the YMCA because I believe that the YMCA is what I am expecting my project to be like. I want my project to exhibit a community of men. In this chapter, I will base my program's foundation off the original foundation and purpose of the YMCA. I will also compare in this chapter my program and YMCA. I will highlight the fact that the YMCA has changed over the years including that the YMCA is not centered around my main two demographics African Americans and or men. In conclusion, my program will be one that I hope will benefit the church because it was develop men to take on leadership and or service roles within the church. Essentially, I hope that the men who participate in my program will find salvation and or become a disciple. Each man will disciple the other man and then reach out to the community to disciple other men.

When the YMCA first begin, it was founded in London with a specific goal from George Williams. According to the YMCA website, "When George Williams founded the first YMCA in Industrial Revolution-era London, he sought to create a supportive community to help young men like himself address pressing social challenges."¹ George Williams wanted a community just for young men to address social challenges. Over the years though the YMCA does not just address social challenges. It has become more of a place for both young men and women to attend for activities like physical exercise, childcare, and after school tutoring programs. Some argue that the YMCA is not just for young people though, but there are benefits for all ages. Parents benefit from the

¹ The Y, "Our History," YMCA of the USA, <https://www.ymca.org/who-we-are/our-history>.

childcare and after school tutoring program because it relieves stress off them to focus on something else that maybe more pressing for them.

This is made clear by the YMCA current purpose. Their purpose is, “As the nation’s leading nonprofit, the Y is committed to empowering people to reach their full potential, to improving well-being, inspiring action, strengthening communities and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to become healthier, more confident, connected and secure.”² Notice how their purpose is not just for young people but for empowering people in general. The focus is not just on addressing social challenges, but improving well-being, inspiring action, strengthening communities, and ensuring that everyone could become healthier, more confident, connected, and secure. While it may be beneficial for the YMCA to do more, moving away from its original purpose has caused issues for young men to find a place of safety and community to get the necessary help that they need.

The YMCA have been active for over 175 years. In these 175 years the focus has been on the total person. However, by dealing with the total person, they likewise have enriched communities as a result. Their websites states, “For more than 175 years, the Y has been building spirit, mind and body for all. We know that strong people build strong communities – because we are all better together.”³ Notice that the YMCA says strong people build strong communities. I appreciate this statement because I believe that this is true. Nonetheless, I believe I can argue further that because men are called to be the leaders of their homes, they are likewise called to become the ones who build strong

² The Y, “Our History.”

³ The Y, “Our History.”

communities. As a result, the men must become strong individuals themselves. YMCA concludes by saying that we are all better together. I think this is important especially for African American men who often desire to be a lone ranger. Instead, they must find community with other men, and by doing this they will discover themselves becoming better together.

The desire to make young men better and make a community of betterment for all is derived from the people the YMCA accepted. Some believe that the YMCA was only meant for disorderly conduct men. This is argued against by the fact that according to the YMCA website, they “gathered to organize a refuge for young men seeking escape from the hazards of the streets.”⁴ Instead of taking in men that had disorderly conduct, they wanted to save young men who wanted a better life for themselves and wanted to escape from the hazardous streets. The point was to help these young men not conform to their environment. It was to help them get a better life from their current environment and circumstance. The YMCA was a place where they could escape their daily life while also finding peace and help them to deal with what they would go back to.

According to the Young Men's Christian Association of Montreal:

The Association is an open door to every young man who wants the good as opposed to the evil. A home for young men away from home. A place of good resort for those who are living at home. It offers recreation without temptation. It offers a solid and enduring substitute for the fast life sought after by many young men. The warm hand of Christian helpfulness, the uplifting influence of good companionship and inspiration to right living are here extended. Surely this is better. Better to-day—better to-morrow and better for eternity.⁵

⁴ The Y, “Our History.”

⁵ The Young Men's Christian Association of Montreal, *The Making of a Man*, https://archive.org/details/cihm_59393/page/n3/mode/2up.

The YMCA of Montreal suggest that the goal of the YMCA is to offer a better option for young men. It is more important to highlight that the YMCA is to give them Christian help. I think that is so important because I feel as if the YMCA have drifted away from being a place where people can get Christian help. I do not think the YMCA associate themselves or claim to be a part of any Christian fellowship. The lack of their connection to be Christian, probably has been beneficial for them because they are able to get more people to come to the YMCA. Nonetheless, I think the absence of Christian help and activities is a hinderance and downfall for the organization. They also mention it is to uplift influence of good companionship. I am intrigued by the language used, but also delighted by what it is suggesting. It suggests that they want men to develop friendship and comrade amongst each other.

Denis Tan makes the argument that the Association is a Christian organization, and their teaching helps with the development of men. Tan states, “Christian character is essential in the making of a man. The Association is a Christian organization. The Christian motive underlies all its activity. Its supreme aim is to win young men to Christ and to enlist their effort in the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men.”⁶ Tan essentially states the YMCA goal, but also helps me have high hope that my project will be success. Tan says the supreme aim is to win young men to Christ and to enlist their effort in the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men. I desire that salvation and discipleship will be the result of the young men who will participate in my project. I am not sure how this will look, but I do believe that it is possible. I think salvation will take place individually and through their own personal commitments. Discipleship will

⁶ Denis W. Tan, “For Youth Development for Healthy Living for Social Responsibility,” The Y, http://www.mfldymca.org/about_us/history_national.php.

become easy based off the relationships that will be developed between the men in the project.

In London, George Williams recognized there was nothing beneficial for young men in the city. As a result, George Williams wanted to provide for them a place that had Christian background. According to Tan, “He and a group of fellow drapers organized the first YMCA to substitute Bible study and prayer for life on the streets.”⁷ While they gather to address the social challenges in their lives, George Williams also provided an escape by having them read the Bible and pray. I do not think this is a method that is beneficial for men, I think they desire for a place of fellowship and being able to express themselves. I struggle with if I want them to experience salvation, how will this happen if we never have conversation around God or conduct any religious activity.

According to the Young Men's Christian Association of Montreal, there has always been great emphasis on the study of the Bible. It is stated:

The past few years have seen marked emphasis laid upon the study of the Bible. Probably more attention is now given to it in schools and colleges than ever before. Our Association has always attached great importance to this, and last year saw much growth in our evening classes for Bible Study. This year we want to do still better. We desire to see at least one-third of our members enrolled in these classes.⁸

There was a time when the Bible had importance, not just on the church but also in schools and in other organizations. We have moved away from having a high importance of the Bible. This even took place in the YMCA. In fact, Tan suggests, “Between 1929 and 1933, Bible class enrollment fell by 60 percent and residence use was down, but exercise and educational classes were both up, along with vocational training and

⁷ Tan, “For Youth Development for Healthy Living for Social Responsibility.”

⁸ The Young Men's Christian Association of Montreal, “The Making of a Man.”

camping.”⁹ The reason why the YMCA is not considered a Christian organization anymore is because its focus over the past few years have become more on exercise and educational classes. To my knowledge, there are no more Bible study classes being offered by the YMCA. There are probably some benefits from not offering these classes, because they probably get more people to attend and be a part of the YMCA. However, if they are Christian organization, I believe there should be some type of Christian event or training that will be a part of their agenda and offerings. Even if that is just prayer being offered on a couple of days out of the week by a chaplain. They could even decide to do just a moment of meditation and word once a day.

Since my focus is on African American man, I want to look at what the YMCA did for African Americans, and how African Americans benefited from being a part of the YMCA. According to the YMCA, “In 1853 in Washington, D.C., the first YMCA for African Americans was founded by Anthony Bowen, a freed slave.”¹⁰ When the YMCA finally arrived in America, it was first in Boston. Then thirteen years after the very first YMCA, in Washington, D.C. Anthony Bowen founded one. This suggest the third YMCA was started because of an African American. It is interesting that they note that Anthony Bowen was a freed slave. The next time that African Americans are mentioned in the history of the YMCA is when they state, “In 1910, twenty-five African American YMCAs were built in twenty-three cities because of a challenge grant program announced by Sears Roebuck founder Julius Rosenwald. The Ys included clean, safe dorm rooms and eating facilities, which were a boon to Black travelers, especially

⁹ Tan, “For Youth Development for Healthy Living for Social Responsibility,” The Y, http://www.mfldymca.org/about_us/history_national.php.

¹⁰ The Y, “Our History.”

servicemen, in a segregated and discriminatory era.”¹¹ There is a great increased of YMCA specifically for African Americans being built, and the YMCA begins to include things that attract African American travelers and servicemen. Some YMCA seems to become more focused on helping advance and further African Americans.

On the other hand, Ninja Mjagkij gives us better insight into why there were more YMCA being founded by African Americans. Mjagkij suggest that African Americans had to find their own YMCA because whites excluded blacks from their own YMCA.

Mjagkij says:

The YMCA had excluded blacks from membership in white associations since its emergence in the United States in 1852. Despite this exclusion, the YMCA encouraged African Americans to establish their own associations and join the Christian brotherhood on “separate-but-equal” terms. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many African Americans, particularly the educated elite, responded with enthusiasm.¹²

Even in the YMCA there was still racism and segregation that took place. Nonetheless, African American educated elite wanted to build and be a part of the YMCA. Mjagkij suggest that although the YMCA had excluded blacks, their mission and value helped African Americans with their stand against racism and segregation. Mjagkij says, “The black elite welcomed the YMCA’s mission to develop “the whole man – body, mind, and spirit,” particularly at a time when white society refused to recognize African American men fully as men.”¹³ By joining with the YMCA, African Americans help teach other African American men and display to white people the fact that they were fully men in

¹¹ The Y, “Our History.”

¹² Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 1.

¹³ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 1.

body, mind, and spirit. By doing this it helped them develop character as well, but also seek respect as a human being.

The reason I believe that the YMCA was not successful among African Americans, despite the fact that elite African Americans founded a lot of YMCA's, is because YMCA overall did not address the reality that African Americans were faced with. Mjagkij states:

The Christian brotherhood did not challenge racism, discrimination, or segregation but embraced jim Crowism. Nevertheless, African Americans joined the YMCA in large numbers: they built their own associations and staffed them with black leaders. After establishing control over their associations, African Americans challenged jim crowism and pressured the YMCA to desegregate all of its facilities.¹⁴

African Americans joined the YMCA to help them fight and challenge racism and segregation. They not only challenged it in the world, but even in the YMCA. They desired that the YMCA made all facilities integrated. In a sense, the YMCA facilities built by African Americans were used as headquarters to help get information out about African Americans challenging the system.

As African Americans challenged the system, it led to eventually dialogue needing to take place about racism. However, true dialogue could never take place because actual change was never a possibility. "Although white YMCA officials increasingly sought dialogue with their black coworkers, they rarely challenged the associations Jim Crow policy."¹⁵ Mjagkij continues by saying, "African Americans welcomed the opportunity for interracial dialogue, but as long as the YMCA denied them equality, they were determined to maintain separate associations. Reluctant to give up

¹⁴ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 1-2.

¹⁵ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 5.

their autonomy, African American YMCA officials insisted on their right “for self-expression and self-determination.”¹⁶ African Americans wanted change and not just conversation. They also understood that if they had conversation it would lead to the possibility of those white YMCA officials to take away their power. The African American YMCA officials wanted to keep the power so they can continue to be empowered to raise their voice against an injustice and racial system. By using the YMCA, it allowed communication to be faster spread and the African American officials had leverage over the other YMCA especially the white YMCA officials.

With the need for change, the African Americans ventured out of the YMCA and created a YMCA to meet the needs of the African American community that they saw and knew was needed. In fact, according to Leroy Davis they centered the YMCA to help blacks. Leroy Davis wrote:

As they did with so many other American institutions, African Americans transformed the Colored Department of the YMCA into a vehicle for racial uplift. If whites regarded the YMCA “as an organization that safeguarded the morals of young uprooted men in the city by surrounding them with a proper and wholesome environment: African Americans regarded it as one designed to help blacks and instill race-based community responsibility.”¹⁷

The African American community took a stand against the YMCA to make sure that there was an emphasis on the community, and it helped shine light on the injustice and racial issues that was plaguing the communities during that time. By dealing with the current events and social issues it allowed those in the community to engage in feeling inspired and enlightened to be better.

¹⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 5.

¹⁷ Davis Leroy, *A Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 186.

I think it is very important that the YMCA wanted to surround young men with a proper and wholesome environment. This may look different today than it did when the YMCA was first created. In fact, why was there a need for a proper whole some environment outside of the church? If the purpose was to make it a proper wholesome environment how well did the YMCA do regarding the African American community. The question then becomes again what the relationship between the YMCA and African American churches was back then. Did the YMCA help or hinder churches? Although it can be viewed as two different and two separate entities, I wonder was it received that way by those in the community. If it was not, why not and how can this be the result of the man cave.

In Nina Miagkij and Margaret Spratt book, *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA And the YWCA in the City* presents an observation that helps connects the relationship between churches and YMCA. They share in their book, *The Churches, African American YMCA* supporters bemoaned, also failed to address the needs of most young black men in the cities. “Many black ministers responded to the influx of migrants into their communities by constructing larger churches; however, few established any social services for the newcomers. The ministers’ failure to provide adequate and attractive social programs for the migrants, black YMCA advocates insisted, alienated many young men, and drove them out of the churches.”¹⁸ Miagkij and Spratt suggest that the church and ministers failed to address the needs of the young black men. I see this today, there is an avoidance of conversation and determination to include and help young black men. There is disregard for them in our churches and then we wonder why they do not come

¹⁸ Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Ann Spratt, *Men and Women Adrift* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1997), 143.

and why they are not active in our churches. According to Miagkij and Spratt there is more attention on immigrants than young black men. I can resonate with this especially serving in a city that is near the border. There is a more concern for immigrants than there is for the black community. In fact, the association that our church is a part of have a strong migrant center that is supported by all the churches in the association. However, when it comes to the African American Fellowship there is no support and there is a lack of focus and concern about the African American churches that are a part of the association. Since my time of serving, the only church that has supported and been seen in the association is the church that I pastor. On the same hand, the only person that attends the meetings and represent the church is me. The church does not support because they feel like there is more of a focus on the Hispanic delegation and on immigrants.

E. Anthony Rotundo read and reviewed the book *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture*, by Paula Lupkin and shared some insight to the development for the YMCA throughout the years. Rotundo writes:

In the Gilded Age, the Y's mission evolved. It sought "to develop the working power and increase the capacity for usefulness of every young man" (21). To the extent that a useful young man was one who steered away from the snares of urban "sporting life," there was continuity between the ante- and post-bellum YMCA. However, the organization's new purposes had less to do with saving souls and more to do with saving the character of the white-collar workforce.¹⁹

In other words, the YMCA began to shift the focus from just being about sports, to one that help empower and enable people to get jobs and become a part of the workforce. The issue is most of the YMCA that are active today have returned to focusing on just being about keeping people fit and active. There does not seem to be a concern on the social

¹⁹ E. Anthony Rotundo, "Review: Making Space for Men: The YMCA and Its Buildings in Urban Context," <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41721070>.

environment, actions, and events that are taking place. I know for sure that I have young adult men and women who struggle with getting a job besides a work from home job. These are issues that need addressing in our city, but we just sweep them under the rug, and it has only caused more harm to our community.

E. Anthony Rotundo goes on to say that:

These young men imagined an institution that not only had a more secular purpose that it had before the Civil War, but they also envisioned great buildings that would represent that purpose in cities and towns across the nation. In this late-nineteenth-century phase, the standard YMCA building resembled a men's club, not a church, and even included a gymnasium.²⁰

The young men did not like the change that the YMCA because the YMCA continued to change and become more like a men's club. This was far away from the purpose and program of the YMCA. The further it got away from its purpose the more it became irrelevant and impactful for young men to attend. As a result, as we are now in the twenty-first century, the question becomes what is being created or what do young men have where they can come together in community to help them have conversation around social events and help them develop in their character and in their careers.

With no program or entity concerned in helping young men develop their character or career then what are young men supposed to do to help them. Could this be the reason why many of them feel like no one cares about them or for their future? The pressure to be alone in the world and just figure things out on their own is a struggle for them. No help is being given to them, especially to our young black men. There are no positive influence or people that when they do make it reach back to help others make it. Therefore, a community must be formed to help develop them. If not, then there is an

²⁰ Rotundo, "Review: Making Space for Men."

understanding why they turn to the streets and gangs because there is no one else that show a real concern about them and for them.

Paula Lupkin in her book even suggest that the YMCA has drifted away from being this entity. Lupkin says, "What had been designed as moral ballast and a beacon within the commercial landscape and the market system became a free-standing, civic institution and a purveyor of services to a larger public".²¹ The YMCA became more focused on bringing services to a larger public that men did not have their sacred community place any longer. Why yes, I understand just like men need their man cave, women need their sacred space as well. Yet the YMCA should have created two separate institutions instead of combining them together. I further believe that when the YMCA repurposed themselves to become more like a men's gymnasium it created more issues as well. It should have continued to stick with being a place where men can address the social issues they are going through. It could have been more effective with sticking to the original purpose because this is what both young men and women need. By having that institution that promotes community, character development, and career assistance. I think Lupkin makes a great observation, but my concern is what now for young men.

I want to be clear as to why I think the YMCA needs to return to its original purpose. According to Susan Chandler:

It was not unusual for a large crowd to gather in the Y.M.C.A. lobby each evening to use the much-needed meeting and recreational resources ("Y.M.C.A. Busiest," 1914). Job training was available, and athletic competition was popular; photos show men in Buxton, Iowa, posing on gymnastic horses at the "Miners' Y" there (Washington, 1914). Thus Y.M.C.A. work occupied a leading role in social service work among African Americans in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Growing out of years of lonely work by men like Hunton and Moorland,

²¹ Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 111.

African Americans in the Y.M.C.A. moved to take advantage of the opportunity that the Great Migration and Julius Rosenwald's great benefaction presented.²²

While I think the YMCA is being used by people still today, I have notice in recent years more YMCA's closing because of lack of business. The more there are gyms opening around the city, there is also no need for the YMCA to be like a men's gymnasium. However, if it would provide space and resources to help the community that would make the difference. Above just being a gym there must be job training and business development. The more the focused become surrounded on job assistance and community, the more YMCA will become back impactful and a necessity in the community.

This argument is even supported by Leroy Davis when he states that the YMCA "was also a training ground for black leaders, who were expected to be role models within the African American community. Moreover, the city branches paid special attention to education and a religion-based morality designed to develop character."²³ I think this is important to note that if we expect men to become leaders there must be training. There must be someone mentoring, discipling, and helping them to become a better man. In fact, Dr. Roger Jackson would suggest that, "to help a Man forward (nasa) means that you are stirred up and pulled out of where you are, with the aim of enabling another Man to move out on a journey for the purposes of God and the benefit of others."²⁴ I think a major issue that our communities endure is that we have men who

²² Susan Kerr Chandler, "Almost a Partnership': African-Americans, Segregation, and the Young Men's Christian Association," *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 21, no. 1 (1994).

²³ Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul*, 186.

²⁴ Roger Jackson, *Build the Next Man Up: Leading, Serving, and Helping the Next Man Succeed* (Martinsville, IN: Fideli Publishing Inc.), 2014.

have not become men helping other boys to try to become men. As a result, we have a broken system. Therefore, this is why I want to focus my project on forming community and helping develop character.

The issue that I have about trying to do this man cave in the church setting is because I am not sure how receptive young men will be open to the church. It is known that young black men have turned to other entities to help in their development. Bobby Manning even states this when he writes:

Because many churches have historically failed to focus on these foundational necessities, they are failing to engage an entire generation of young men of color who are instead retreating to other organizations where they are willingly giving their time and commitment. David Kinnaman reports “millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their teen years. Some never return, while others live indefinitely at the margins of the faith community, attempting to define their own spirituality.”²⁵

The church failed to address the needs of black men and therefore, they have discovered other entities and organizations to help in their development. While I am focusing on creating this community inside the church, there must be a broader understanding and discussion in the church about becoming a community overall.

In conclusion, if the man cave is going to be effective with the focus on character development, I must help young men understand their identity in the world but most of all in Christ. We live in a world where the identity of black men is tarnished and blurred. Therefore, I must help them understand their identity which will result in helping them develop their character around that identity. Until they know who they are they will not act in the moral and mental reality of that person. So, we must help them see themselves

²⁵ Bobby Manning, *Saving Our Sons: Effectively Engaging Young Men of Color* (Washington D.C.: StreetLight Ministries, 2014), 4.

through the Imago Dei, to help develop them to be the light of their community and to help them become the necessary leaders in their communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The feeling of being unwanted and unneeded. Always being told that they are no good and that they will never amount to anything in life. When they turn on the television there is always the critique and criticism against them. They are always grouped together as the bad person. They are never highlighted, praised, or congratulated if they do something good or amazing. If you are wondering who they are I am talking about millennial black men. Black men are considered in general to be no good. Every time they turn on the news, they discover news articles and reports about black men doing wrong. There are never news articles about the accomplishments and the success of black men. From a young age, children are taught that they are going to become or be like their no good father, especially in the black household.

During the pandemic, we began to see how much there was so much hate and violence towards black men in our everyday lives. For example, we witnessed the murder of George Floyd. We saw how they put their knees on his neck, and even after crying and begging them to get up; they stayed there. We saw the murder of Ahmad Aubrey and the no knock warrant served to Brianna Taylor. To be sure, the killing of African American men did not just begin during the pandemic, but it has continued to be this way. Even before, we have witnessed the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Emmitt Till, and so many countless African American men who were lynched and killed all because of the

color of their skin. What is it about our skin that makes us the victim, makes us scary and not afforded the opportunity to be treated equally? Why is it that a person or group of people are willing to kill black men for no reason?

Everything around us suggest that we are not worthy and that we should ultimately fail. Therefore, my focus for this project is to create a space where it shows a different perspective of themselves and other millennial African American males. I desire to create a safe space where African American men can decompress from the pressure and the criticism from the outside world and be open and honest with who they are and where they are currently in life. A space where we can freely and openly talk about what we are dealing with and how we can become more successful in our lives.

Essentially, I have a desire to highlight and show those who participate in this project the theology about Imago Dei. It is my hope and desire to help African American millennial men see that despite what society and even those closest to them think about them that they have been made in the image of God. Since they have been made in the image of God that being a black man does not mean that ultimately, they will become nobody and that they are worth nothing. Instead, because they have the image of God on them, they will receive the blessings of God. Being made in the image of God means they are wonderfully made by God.

If I can help African American millennial men see the God in them then I believe it will enhance and lead to them embracing better relationships with others, but more importantly a relationship with God. They will understand that their connection with God is significant to who they are and how they shall operate as beings in the world. Furthermore, it is my belief. When men understand that they have been made in the

image of God, it will also cause them to understand the love of God. It is my belief that the reality most of African American millennial men have been faced with are homes and friendship that don't display real love to them. As a result, their neglect of love causes them to act in ways of people with no love. African American millennial men are always criticized and never loved on. Therefore, trying to help them see and understand the love of God is significant to their overall growth in life. This same love will then move them to love others around them.

I begin by first examining the fact that we are not the only one's created in God's image. According to Genesis 1: 26; Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..." In other words, Jesus is also God's image in human flesh. According to the gospel, Jesus is presented for us a Jewish boy/man, with brown skin, who is a minority that gets arrested, beaten, and killed by those who are in power. Joan Harrell raises an important question, she states, "If I am made in the image of God, why do I experience oppression from other Christians who devalue my humanity because my skin is Black?"¹ This is so significant because I think far too often, we ignore the fact that our humanity as African Americans are constantly devalued. On the other hand, the life of Jesus was devalued as he was crucified.

Since we are made in the image of God, what does this actually mean for us? The Bible declares, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,

¹ Joan R. Harrell, "A Womanist Perspective: Imago Dei in Black and White," *Liturgy* 23, no 3. (May 6, 2008): 15-24.

when none of them as yet existed” (Ps. 139: 14-16). However, Mark Ross makes an interesting point when he says that “Surprising as it is, man is made according to God’s “kind,” made in the image of God (*imago Dei*). Man, like God, is a personal being. God Himself, as the Bible later reveals, is three persons all sharing one divine essence. Human persons are created beings, and in that regard (as in others) they are similar to and share characteristics with other created beings.”² In other words, envy, strife, and jealousy should not be a part of our characteristics since we are made to be similar and share in same characteristics of each other. We are created in the likeness of God, and although we are one person, we share the same similarities of others. We are created to be in the likeness of each other, however, too often we do not act like it.

According to Donald K. McKim, “Imago Dei (the image of God) is the condition in which humans were created so that they might have a relationship with God.”³ This is my main issue with race, we have placed it a high regard. When you apply for a job, on the application, you must fill out and respond to the question what race or ethnicity group you belong too. We are understood and delegated by race, but despite race we have to be reminded that we are one. We may come from different cultures and backgrounds, but we come from the shaping of one which is Jesus, the Christ. God has formed us to be who we are and look the way we do because God made us in God’s like image. The Psalmist says as a result we can declare boldly that we have been fearfully and wonderfully made and wonderful are God’s work.

² Mark Ross, “Imago Dei” *Ligonier Ministries*, Tabletalk Magazine, 1 Apr. 2013, www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/imago-dei/.

³ Harrell, *A Womanist Perspective*, 15.

The Imago Dei is powerful when we think about it because we have been made in the image of God. However, do we always best represent the image of God with how we act, think, or do things? I would argue our lifestyles makes us look less like God. Even Mark Ross states that the presence of sin has caused the image of God to be defaced. Mark Ross states, “Tragically, the man and the woman turned away from God and fell into sin, seeking to become yet more like God (3:5); to choose for themselves what is good and evil. The image of God was defaced.”⁴ When sin is present people cannot see the image of God through us. Sin clouds people’s view of the God in us and through us. Selfies seem to always be used to put a front and it ends up blocking the true image of who we are. Ross says the image of God was defaced, when we envy and become jealous through social media, are we defacing the image of God. We see this take place in Mark 5, J. D. Grassmick states that:

Elaborately describes his pathetic condition. He lived in the tombs (an outcast); he was uncontrollable for no one could ... subdue (from *damazō*, “to tame a wild animal”) him, not even with fetters for his feet or a chain for his hands. He went about night and day shrieking wildly and cutting himself with sharp stones, perhaps in a demonic form of worship. Such behavior shows that demon possession is not mere sickness or insanity but a desperate satanic attempt to distort and destroy God’s image in man.⁵

I will be the first to admit that there are sometimes I get on my different social media outlets, and I feel as if Christians have defaced the image of God. Because I will see members of my church in deep praise and worship on Sunday, but Monday through Saturday they are on social media doing all kind of things (sinning). As a result, I just

⁴ Mark Ross, “Imago Dei,” *Tabletalk Magazine*, 1 Apr. 2013, www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/imago-dei/.

⁵ Grassmick, *Mark*, 122–123.

feel they have friends on social media who are looking for God through them, but they struggle to find God because God's image has been defaced and to some extent can no longer be seen.

Furthermore, we have positioned ourselves to be like the artist Craig Detweiler mentions who paints an image of himself in iconic religious style. Since we have defaced the image of God in us, we must put on a mask that makes people think we still look like Christ. Detweiler says:

By painting himself in an iconic religious style, Dürer could be advancing himself as a substitute for Christ. But it seems more likely that he portrayed himself as beautiful in an effort to celebrate the enduring beauty of Jesus. Dürer seems to be saying, "If you can see Christ in me, then perhaps you can begin to see Christ in you as well." When we dismiss selfies as acts of self-aggrandizement, we may be short selling adolescents' efforts to acknowledge how fearfully and wonderfully we're made (Ps. 139:14).⁶

It is not clear why Dürer painted himself as an iconic religious style; however, I believe although we should try to look like Christ people have become a great example of what two-faced people look like. They only look like Christ on Sunday in church but look like the defaced image of God every other day of the week. By doing this, we are using the tactics of Satan. According to R. L. Cooper when he states:

Mark painted a picture of a man in a pitiable state. He could not live with his family, so he lived alone (or with another demon-possessed person, according to Matthew) in a graveyard. He was strong enough to break the chains that bound him, but not strong enough to expel the demons from his body. His shrieking was heard throughout the countryside. He was even violent toward himself and cut himself with stones. He was naked and most likely covered with scars. Even after the Fall, the image of God, the *imago dei*, resided in humans. Demons, in this case and others, did what they could to destroy the image of God.⁷

⁶ Craig Detweiler, *Selfies: Searching for the Image of God in a Digital Age* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 59.

⁷ R. L. Cooper, *Mark*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 84.

It is our responsibility to use our lifestyles to further promote the image of God. However, we have become like Adam and Eve and deface the image of God because people can no longer see God through us because of our fall to sin.

There must come a point when we allow others to see the Imago Dei. We have placed so much faith in this world, unfortunately, the world has led us astray as to what the image of God looks like. Herbie Newell says, “Within God’s great economy Black Lives Matter, Babies Lives in the Womb Matter, People with Down Syndrome Matter, Babies Born-with-only-a-brain-stem Lives Matter, Elderly lives Matter, Prostitutes Lives Matter, and All Lives Matter because we are created in the Imago Dei—the very image of God.”⁸ Can people look at our lives and beliefs and see the Imago Dei or a defaced image of God? Would they say that we best represent the view of God in the Bible through our lives, or would they say that our sins have placed a cloud of distort on their view and image of God. The words of Detweiler remains in me that:

The twenty-first century is global, polyglot, diverse. In all that variety, our reach will exceed our grasp. We have to be willing to surrender a certain amount of control. Consider our images. Once we have taken a photo and posted it for all the world to see, we have lost control of that image. It can be morphed, blended, and photoshopped into all kinds of strange and disconcerting memes. We can be co-opted into a surrealistic painting or melded into someone else’s dream. Once our photo is on the internet, almost anyone can monkey with it.⁹

Anyone can distort the view and image of what we may try to present. We have no control over what people see and create from viewing our selfies. However, I still would suggest we should work hard to present to everyone the best presentation of the Imago

⁸ Herbie Newell, “Stepping into a Multi-Cultural World: Racial Reconciliation and the Gospel” *Lifeline Children’s Services*, July 13, 2021, <https://lifelinechild.org/stepping-into-a-multi-cultural-world-racial-reconciliation-the-gospel/>.

⁹ Detweiler, *Selfies: Searching for the Image of God in a Digital Age*, 176.

Dei. With the hope like Dürer that, “If you can see Christ in me, then perhaps you can begin to see Christ in you as well.”¹⁰

Herbie Newell could not have stated it better when she said:

Our country needs healing. Our nation needs a moral compass. America has forsaken her true love. Battles are being lost in the courtroom. Elections are between candidates who have forgotten how to blush (Jeremiah 6:15). Americans worry more about the economy than ethics and honesty. We are battling each other on the streets because we have lost the truth of Imago Dei—that we are all made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27).¹¹

This is especially true for African Americans. We are killing each other because we do not see the imago dei or worth in one another. We have been wounded with indoctrination that all; black people are bad or a threat. Therefore, we treat each other as such. We discriminate, we stereotype people, we are prejudice towards one another. Our indoctrination has caused us to become a community divided.

There is a way to combat racism in America, according to Todd Wilson. Todd Wilson says:

Evangelicals have a set of biblical, theological, and cultural tools we use for dealing with the problem of race: the necessity of personal responsibility, the possibility of heart renewal through faith in Jesus, the transformative impact of interpersonal relationships, and the bedrock conviction that every human being is made in the image of God (imago Dei) and is thus of equal worth and dignity. These are our go-to weapons in the fight against racism.¹²

Evangelical Christian has a lot to answer when it relates to how they treat and believe in the Bible but treat their African American brothers and sisters contrary to the Bible. Especially in the United States, it is probably the only nation where we have a problem

¹⁰ Detweiler, *Selfies: Searching for the Image of God in a Digital Age*, 59.

¹¹ Herbie Newell, “The Lost Truth of Imago Dei: Racial Reconciliation & The Gospel.” *Lifeline Children's Services*, July 13, 2021, <https://lifelinechild.org/the-lost-truth-of-imago-dei/>.

¹² Todd Wilson, “More than Imago Dei – Todd Wilson,” *The Center for Pastor Theologians*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.pastortheologians.com/articles/2020/9/1/more-than-imago-dei>.

between races. Until everyone in America sees each other from the perspective of the image of God, then racism will remain present and prevalent in the United States. Until we are no longer considered 3/5 of a person but equal in every right. While there is pressure for the African American community to experience reconciliation, the issue is that the Caucasians brothers and sisters must first acknowledge, admit, and apologize for their actions towards African Americans. Caucasians want forgiveness, but they have not actually given a sincere apology. After there is a sincere apology, we must also submit to the difference of our cultures.

In the book, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* by Dwight Hopkins, it suggests that “In addition to conceptual clarifications, theological anthropology must take on the discourse of race because God interacts with human beings through culture in specific collective selves and the individual self. The single self and corporate selves receive transcendent spirits in the existing racialized preoccupation and obsession in U.S. racialized culture.”¹³ Hopkins enhances the idea that God is in all societies and cultures. That God is not just in one specific culture, gender, or society. This is the similar idea when Paul writes there is now Jew nor Gentile, no men or woman. God is for all. Because all has been made from the image and likeness of God. To raise one race above another is to transcend a culture of an unequal out of balance God. This is also significant for the African American community who have this belief of a White Jesus/God, when we understand that God is a part of the black culture. The black culture was developed from the image of God. Before, Christianity was ever introduced to African Americans in the United States, our forefathers knew about God and had developed relationship with God

¹³ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 129.

and worshipped God in our creative ways through our culture. Therefore, our culture and our relationship with God has always been a strong connecting force that has been present since the beginning of time. We must continue to see God through our culture and creative lenses. The moment we start to look at God from other cultural lenses is when we lose focus and understanding about God in our lives. As well as we will lose focus of who we are in God. We cannot lose focus of our identity and image in and through God as African Americans.

It is the scholar Albert Thomas Howard who writes:

Against a biblical background, we believe that human beings are created in the “image of God.” This imago Dei nature in humans implies free will and moral responsibility, personal and social. Also implied is a worthy understanding of God as creator of human life. God is lovingly just. God is a being of moral integrity who loves righteousness. God has a well-rounded moral character, being both “tough-minded” and “tender-hearted.”¹⁴

If African American men are going to see the Imago Dei within themselves, they must see and understand God in Godself. Albert Howard gives a perspective on God that is essential and helpful to understand God. Howard makes the statement that the Imago Dei is deeper than looking at people, but there is a moral responsibility, personal and social. I do not think we understand that we have a responsibility when it comes to being a part of the Imago Dei. If we want to be accepted in the Imago Dei, we have the responsibility to accept others into the Imago Dei.

Then Howard says we must have a worthy understanding of God. Our view of God can help us understand our view of ourselves. I think, often the reason we have a low view of ourselves is because we have a very low view of God. Howard makes the

¹⁴ James Deotis Roberts, *Black Religion, Black Theology: The Collected Essays of J. Deotis Roberts*, ed. David Emmanuel Goatley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 170-171.

statement that God is “tough-minded” and “tender-hearted.” Those are interesting terms that Howard uses because when I think about the terminology and description for African Americans, especially African American men, “tough-minded” and “tender-hearted” are the words that are commonly used. This should be encouragement and helpful for African American men as they see themselves in God. I think what is more important is that African American men should not feel the need to have to change to fit into the Imago Dei. Instead, African American men can continue to be themselves and find themselves within the Imago Dei.

Albert Thomas Howard continues to write that, “God is the Creator, Provider, and Redeemer of humankind. Being related to God properly leads us to be gravely concerned about evil and suffering in the world. As believers redeemed by divine grace, we are to express our faith actively in the alleviation of suffering among humans in the social world. This includes personal and interpersonal ethical involvement.”¹⁵ If African American men are really going to find themselves in and be a part of the Imago Dei then there is a responsibility for them to help in making the world become greater. When one has become a part of the Imago Dei, they are responsible to help make the world a better place. They are to develop and become all in one. To take on helping society requires strength that a person does not have solely by themselves. Instead, they must understand themselves through the Imago Dei, and then take on what is called the Missio Dei through their lives. The Imago Dei should help each of us see the evil in the world and decide not to just sit back and let it continue to happen, but instead take a stand and do something about it. Especially when we see the evil done towards others who are a part

¹⁵ Roberts, *Black Religion, Black Theology*, 171.

of the Imago Dei. Any suffering amongst any humans is suffering that is also being done unto us. Imago Dei calls for us to become involved in the issues and it help others see a different perspective of the Imago Dei, in action and not just a term. It should help us express our faith but more importantly show others the true God that we believe in and are a part of.

As I try to prepare this community for African American men, I had to make sure that I understood the beliefs of Imago Dei concerning the church and association that I am a part of. Therefore, I am intrigued by what Albert Thomas Howard continues to write as he talks about the Baptist faith, Howard states:

As in some earlier creeds, the article affirms that gender was part of God's original design— "He created them male and female" – and that gender is one of God's good gifts to humanity. Moreover, as with the original statements, the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 insists on the sanctity of the human person: "Every person of every race possesses full dignity." Given the sad, long shadow of slavery and segregation in American history in general and Southern Baptist history in particular, the article is at pains to stress racial unity and "full" dignity.¹⁶

We must accept God's plan to make us different. It was God's intention to make us different. However, to be different does not mean that any of us are greater than or less than the other one. We all are equal, and we must respect each other as our equal. We all have a purpose, and God made all of us for a specific reason. When we allow our equality to become blur, it suggest that the Imago Dei does not matter anymore. We then stop allowing the Imago Dei to guide our view on people and allow the world to dictate our view and perspective of others. Even if that view or perspective is falsified and distorted based upon lies and rumors. We must be determined to continue to look at people the way God created them. Never allowing their image to become blurred by worldly

¹⁶ Howard, *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective*, 108.

perceptions and thoughts. Instead deciding to be acceptive of them as our brothers or sisters no matter the race. Everyone deserves what Albert Howard calls dignity. Over the recent years we have seen that especially among African American men there is a lack of dignity or respect. There is so often black on black crime; and it is rooted in the fact that they have no self-respect, so they do not respect others. My hope is through the Man Cave we can create self-respect for oneself and then help them learn how to respect others.

Dwight Hopkins agrees with Albert Thomas Howard when he writes, “All people are involved in a healthy theological anthropology. They are made in God’s image (imago dei) and are equally called to pursue the mission dei (mission of God). Unfortunately, certain physical traits typologize peoples so that some interpret Christianity, unleash capitalism, and define the notions of civilization at the expenses of the majority of the world’s dark-skinned peoples and their connection with divinity.”¹⁷ Hopkins makes the observation that when we look at all people they must be studied or interpreted through the lenses of the Bible. We cannot look at them from a worldly perspective because humans are not of or made from the world. They have been made in God’s image and therefore must be viewed by God’s image to understand them. When we do not use the Imago Dei, the interpretation and view on people is erased and difficult to see. Unfortunately, Hopkins points out, that this distortion happens a lot to majority of the world’s dark-skinned people. Before one gives an African American a chance to show them who they are, there has already been some predetermined interpretations and understanding of who they might be. This is why you will see Caucasian women grip

¹⁷ Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*, 159.

their purse tighter when they see an African American man coming close to them. This is why you will hear police officers make the statement that when they encounter an African American man, “their life was threaten.” It is not because the African American man has done anything, but rather because a predetermined thought, viewpoint, and or interpretation has been made about the type of person they are.

This is further supported when Dwight Hopkins writes:

One amazing reality-or miracle- of the human-divine interaction is the persistent creative genius of global dark-skinned peoples. Millions have, in the midst of a damning definition of white skin privileges, appropriated both racial categories and a reinterpreted Christianity to model a theological anthropology of individual renewal and structural transformation toward the practice of freedom-that is to say, a new self and a new commonwealth.¹⁸

Hopkins informs us how throughout the years African Americans have been committed to reinterpreting our perception but most of all our theology on society and cultures and how we view others. Hopkins calls it a new self. When you see yourself differently, you can see others from a different perspective. My whole desire is to help African American young men to see themselves in a different perspective. The world has tarnished the way people see African American men and at the same time African American men have begun to see themselves from the perspective that the world has given them. This tarnished view has affected the way African American young men behave, act, and treat each other. African American men must find their new self and it must be based upon the Word of God. It is clear all other perceptions have them to be of lower standards and unequal to anyone else in the world, but when they accept the perspective of the Imago Dei, then their new perspective will enable them to find themselves equal in the world. I want them to be assured and very aware of who they are when they receive their new

¹⁸ Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*, 160.

perspective. A realization that they are not just made from the image of God, but they also have God in them. I believe that knowing that God is in them will help them to be receptive of what they do and how they act. At least, assure them to be and or become who God has made them to be.

The professor Ryan Kelley gives a great viewpoint about the Imago Dei and how Americans must rethink our theological truths. Ryan Kelley writes:

Only by embracing this core theological truth can white Americans begin to reimagine the way to love our Black brothers and sisters, seeking to learn their stories of struggle and responding with empathetic lament and the hope for liberation. For this reason, I begin each semester by telling students that we must actively acknowledge and honor the imago Dei in one another as we enter into conversation.¹⁹

Professor Kelley states that Americans have detoured away from theological truths. As a result, it has led to destruction and damage in our world. I could not agree more with Professor Kelley. I realize that when we put other things above the Bible, we are calling for damage and destruction to happen. As it relates specifically to the Imago Dei, when we stop looking at each other from a biblical perspective we desire to accept falsified truths about a person before we even get to know that person. This is what hinders relationships, community, and unity to be present today. We have accepted lies over the truth. We instead face now hate and discuss for each other and even among each other. Kelley mentions hate between white Americans and black Americans, but there is hate among black Americans and other black Americans. I appreciate the fact that Professor Kelley mentions though that it begins with seeking to learn their stories. When you do not know someone's story, how can you really say that you know anything about them. This

¹⁹ Ryan Kelley, "Reimagining Racial Justice: Shakespeare, Douglass, and the Visibility of the Imago Dei," *The Other Journal*, <https://theotherjournal.com/2022/02/reimagining-racial-justice-shakespeare-douglass-imago-dei/>.

is essential if community is going to form, you must know a person's story. Not so quick to past judgment or criticize, but always ready to hear their past to understand their present. Accepting that their story is what makes them who they are.

Professor Ryan Kelley goes on to say:

I also challenge them to practice acknowledging and honoring the imago Dei when reading the words of the authors in classroom texts, whether they died three hundred years ago or are still living and writing today. These thinkers were and are image-bearers, and their human dignity is affirmed in the many ways that their writing reflects this: creativity, intelligence, compassion, conviction.²⁰

Professor Kelley encourages his students to always keep the Imago Dei in perspective when you listen and read people's writings. I highlight this because I think it is far too easy for a person to tune out someone because their viewpoint of them does not fall under or include the perspective of the Imago Dei. As we work on this community, I realize that yes, my focus is on African American men, but we all come from different backgrounds. Whether where we were born, who we live with, how we came to El Paso, and even what we do for a living. However, despite our differences our perspective must still be a perspective that comes from the theological truth centered around the Imago Dei. On the same hand, while this community is being formed for African American young men, the predominately race of those that live in El Paso is the Hispanic race. As a result, I must help them to understand to make sure in their everyday living that they see people from the Imago Dei perspective. It will help them understand a person, and they should allow that person to share their story. By giving others the chance to share their story, it opens for them the opportunity to share their story with others as well.

²⁰ Kelley, "Reimagining Racial Justice."

Dr. James Cone, the black theologian, has a strong viewpoint and opinion that we must consider as it relates to the Imago Dei and African Americans. In *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Dr. Cone writes:

The image of God refers to the way in which God intends for man to live in the world. The image of God is thus more than rationality, more than what so-called neo-orthodox theologians call divine-human encounter. In a world in which men are oppressed, the image is man in rebellion against structures of oppression. It is man involved in the liberation struggle against the forces of humanity.²¹

Dr. Cone helps us understand that if we are going to take on the perspective of the Imago Dei, we must understand that the Imago Dei gives insight into how God wants people to live. If this is the case, to better understand the African American man, the viewpoint of Imago Dei and oppression is that they are rebellion against structures of oppression. In other words, the African American community is in a constant struggle. I wrestle with this because what does that really mean. Especially if I am trying to give the African American men in my project a different perspective of looking at themselves. It will be hard to give them a different perspective if in the perspective I give they are still in the struggling predicament. The question then must be asked is the struggle they face the reason why they do not develop community amongst themselves. I must find the root of the issue and address the issue. Instead, of trying to avoid or dismiss their predicament of struggle, maybe the answer is to face their struggle and then help them understand through their struggle they can develop a different characteristic of themselves. I think while yes there may be an urge to go against the struggle, what does it look like for a person to accept their struggles and use their struggles to bring out the best that is within themselves.

²¹ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 170.

To conclude, if the community is going to be formed, I must help those who make up the community see themselves and other people through the theological truth about the Imago Dei. That we do not accept just the worldly perspective about us, but we accept the biblical perspective about every person. It is important that we help them see they are made in the image of God, but they also have God in them. By seeing others in the image of God, it is the hope they will love and show kindness, care, and concern to all people. I must help them understand that we do not desire to ignore the truth about struggling, but instead accept the fact that from our story of struggling we can develop characteristics that can help make us a better individual. By developing characteristics that will lead to a change life for them, but ultimately them making a difference in the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATION

When I examine my project and what I hope will come from it, the one desire that I have is that I can help develop the identity of Black men in better way. Therefore, after much research I came across what psychologist call the Chickering Theory by Arthur Chickering. Chickering's theory attempts to explain the process every person follows during identity development.¹ This theory sheds insight and information that is useful to helping me develop the identity of the men that will become a part of this project. The Chickering Theory utilizes seven vectors of development, which are believed to contributed to the unique identities that people create for themselves:

1. Developing competence.
2. Learning to manage emotions.
3. Transitioning from autonomy to inter-dependence.
4. Developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
5. Establishing a personal identity.
6. Developing a personal purpose.
7. Understanding the definition of integrity.²

Despite the theory being suitable for my project, there are some concerns about incorporating the theory. These concerns must be known so that I can highlight where

¹ Arthur Chickering, "Chickering Theory Explained," Health Research Funding, <https://healthresearchfunding.org/chickering-theory-explained/>.

² Chickering, "Chickering Theory Explained."

Chickering Theory will work for my project, and where Chickering Theory will not work. I also make these known so that there can be no mistakes about how my project correlates with Chickering Theory.

I begin with highlighting that Chickering Theory focus is on college students. While my focus does have some college student ages involved in them, college students are not my main focus. My focus is on Black men who are between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five years old. This is important because often black men do not seek therapy. According to Tori DeAngelis, “only 26.4% of Black and Hispanic men ages eighteen to forty-four who experienced daily feelings of anxiety or depression were likely to have used mental health services, compared with 45.4% of non-Hispanic White men with the same feelings.”³ If they are not seeking mental health services, this will probably make it difficult for me to get them to become open and acceptable to conversation and dialogue with those they really do not know. However, I have hope that my project will be of much success, because while they may not seek individual therapy, as African American men we do seek group therapy.

Tori DeAngelis shares insight that, “internalized views of masculinity “make a lot of Black men resistant to therapy and more likely to seek informal ways of addressing their mental health through barbershops, church, religion, or talking to family members,” said psychologist Erlanger “Earl” Turner, PhD, an assistant professor at Pepperdine University in Los Angeles.”⁴ African American men are more comfortable being around

³. T. DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters,” *Monitor on Psychology* 52, no. 6 (September 2021), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/09/ce-black-mental-health>.

⁴ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

other African American who have been or are going through currently what they are going through. They prefer a sense of community that will help uplift and build them.

This is something they cannot get in therapy because, “When Black men do seek help and would prefer a same-race provider, it can be difficult finding Black psychologists, since they still make up only about 4% of the doctoral-level psychology workforce (though that number is growing.”⁵ I remember when I first started doing individual therapy, I sought to have a black male therapist, and it was difficult to find one. I had to settle for a black female therapist, and even then, I did not completely open or become free to be myself around her. I was uncertain if she could relate to what I was going through and what I was facing. I am sure there are other black men who also do not completely open up to their therapist unless the therapist is a black man. The only place to find a great number of black men is in places like the barbershop of your family. On the other hand, because El Paso is a military city, most of the African American men here are far away from their families. As a result, my project is to help create space where they can find family away from their blood family. It would consist of big brothers and father figures that they can talk to for advice.

While the audience of the Chickering Theory is a great concern of mine, I have high hopes that the Chickering Theory will be affective. If you notice the seven vectors, technically, I am not starting with the developing competence vector, I will begin with the developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. This is the fourth vector, and at first, I thought I would have to go for the Chickering Theory to work. However, I discover from research that, “Although the vectors have been listed in a specific order,

⁵ T. DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

Chickering is very specific in his theory that there is not a strict sequential order for them. Some people may develop multiple vectors at once, while others may choose to work on them individually.”⁶ With this information, I realize that I can still use Chickering Theory because for my project several things will be taken place that will help these black men discover their identity within themselves and within society. There will be multiple vectors at work, and I see it as I uncover my biblical, theological, and historical chapters there are multiple vectors that took place in each one of those.

Community

When the pandemic first began, every city and state enforced a stay-at-home mandate. This meant that we were to remain in our houses with only the family members who lived with us. We were told to not visit other family members who were not immediate family members, and we could not go over our friend’s house. I did not know it then, but I know it now that community is so essential for African Americans. Now as a pastor, I see members that show up week after week with the hope they have conversation or receive a hug from someone. Community is a necessity for me as well. I went from spending time with friends one day out of the week, to not being able to spend time with them to relieve my issues. Likewise, I could not go to the barbershop because business was closed out of fear. I know that if I had a mental break down during the pandemic, there were several other African American men who probably did so as well.

My experience with the pandemic was not being able to understand my emotions. Looking back now, I do believe there was a sense of fear, but I also had to lead my

⁶ Chickering, “Chickering Theory Explained.”

family through it. For the first time, I had to sit with my emotions. More specifically, grieve over my mother who died four years before the pandemic, and my grandfather who died a year before the pandemic. Chickering's second vector is learning to manage emotions. According to Michelle Robinson, learning to manage emotions for the Chickering Theory is when "An individual becomes competent in his or her ability to recognize and manage emotions. Incorporation of all emotions and an individual's ability to reasonably manage his or her reactions to events."⁷ Here I was at home with family, but really in a dark place in my mind. I had not really come to terms with the death of my mother and grandfather. In fact, the day after my mother passed, I went to work. I worked as a chaplain for a funeral home. It was my job to provide comfort and pastoral care to the bereaved. However, during my own bereavement, I was trying to care for and provide service to someone else. Furthermore, we are in a pandemic. People are dying every day, every time we turned on the news, we kept hearing more headlines about the number of cases and deaths of people with the coronavirus. Then, two months into the pandemic, still "sheltered in place," we begin to get reports about police brutality. African American men being killed by police. Whether it was from a knee on their neck to being shot multiple times.

The emotional strain and damage that I encountered during the pandemic was vast. I wish that I knew then how to better manage my emotions. Tori DeAngelis shares insight again about what Jessica Jackson did to help African American men manage their emotions. DeAngelis writes:

⁷ Michelle Robinson, "Chickering's Seven Vectors of Identity Development," Student Development Theory Overview, <https://studentdevelopmenttheory.wordpress.com/chickerings-seven-vectors/>.

Jessica L. Jackson, PhD, a counseling psychologist in Houston and global diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging care lead at the mental health tech firm Modern Health, has done some of this work with Black men in settings including the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, the Harris Health System (Texas), and private practice. To help these men identify and become more comfortable with their emotions, she uses a tool called the Feelings Wheel, which labels the spectrum of emotions from the most basic to the most nuanced.⁸

I have some experience with using the feeling wheel, when I did my Clinical Pastoral Education at Christ Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. We were taught and encouraged to use the feeling wheel. The purpose of the feeling wheel is to take how you think you feel and getting to the root of it. Often, we may be angry, but, we are sad about something. The feeling wheel helps proper dispense what a person is feeling. As African American men, I must explore with them their true feelings and to do this the feeling wheel will indeed be effective.

Tori DeAngelis makes a great argument as it relates to African American men and their emotions. DeAngelis states, “Black men’s mental health is more complex than statistics or clinical diagnoses indicate, according to subject matter experts. Because of structural racism and Black men’s unique history in this country, their mental health and treatment are intimately tied to factors such as implicit bias on the part of medical providers, high poverty rates, and low access to quality psychological and psychiatric services.”⁹ As Black men although we do not display our emotions, we have a lot to become emotional about. We are the most pushed down and oppressed people. Every time you turn on the news there is something negative being stated about black men in our country. We are looked upon as the most criminal beings. Even as a black man, I

⁸ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

⁹ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

have preconceived prejudice about other black men when I come into their presence. Researchers from the University of California and University of Pittsburgh have engaged in studying African American men and their emotions. The study was conducted in the Manhood Development Program classes administered by the Oakland Unified School District. They discovered that, “Another part of resisting stereotypes about black males involved helping students discuss personal aspects of their lives and participate in emotional sharing with one another.”¹⁰ In other words, when a community is developed, and emotional sharing take place it will create a place where being prejudice towards one’s own will not happen. One of the reasons we misjudge those people is because of our lack of knowing them. However, this can be changed when safe space is created for people to get to know each other and share their feelings with each other.

Conversation

In Mark chapter five, we find a man who is demon possessed who has an encounter with Jesus. In the African American tradition if one had a mental illness, like depression or suicidal thoughts, they were considered to be demon possessed. If they were demon possessed, they would rely on exorcism and prayer to help them overcome their mental illness. In Mark chapter five, we see a man who is demon possessed, but I want to suggest he is dealing with a mental illness as well. In fact, it is after this man have an encounter and conversation with Jesus that the Bible says, he is clothed and in

¹⁰ Jarvis Givens, et al, “Modeling Manhood: Reimagining Black Male Identities in School,” UC Berkeley – Diversity,” http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/modeling_manhood_reimagining_black_male_identities_in_school.pdf.

his right mind. Amongst community, there must also be conversation that helps develop the men.

When we look at Mark chapter five, there are several vectors taking place. We first see the first vector in action which is developing competence. According to Chickering Theory, he identifies three types of competence. Chickering Theory is you develop competence in intellectual, manual skills, and interpersonal competences. “Intellectual competence specifically refers to the ability to understand, analyze, and synthesize. Manual competence refers to the ability to physically accomplish tasks, where interpersonal competence refers to working and establishing relationships with others.”¹¹ When Jesus approaches this demon possessed man, the Bible says, “when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me’” (Mk. 5: 6-7). This demon possessed man recognized and established a relationship with Jesus. His desire was to understand, analyze, and synthesize why would Jesus come to see about him. Look at what he asks Jesus, what have I to do with you? This unfolding of developing competence is unique, but it helps the man develop himself in the process. The man himself wants to work on establishing a relationship with Jesus, even if the demons do not want to be tormented by Jesus.

We must also highlight the fact this man has been living in the tombs, amongst the graveyard, dwelling in the cemetery. It is there we recognize that he has been living by himself. If this man had a wife and children, we do not know much about them. In

¹¹ Arthur Chickering, “Chickering,” Student Development Theory, <https://studentdevelopmenttheory.weebly.com/chickering.html>.

fact, the Bible is clear, the people who knew this man what they tried to do is bound him with shackles and chains. It is the image of trying to keep this man locked up in a solitary confinement. J. D. Grassmick argues that this treatment is what would be done to animals. J. D. Grassmick says:

Elaborately describes his pathetic condition. He lived in the tombs (an outcast); he was uncontrollable for no one could ... subdue (from *damazō*, “to tame a wild animal”) him, not even with fetters for his feet or a chain for his hands. He went about night and day shrieking wildly and cutting himself with sharp stones, perhaps in a demonic form of worship. Such behavior shows that demon possession is not mere sickness or insanity but a desperate satanic attempt to distort and destroy God’s image in man.¹²

Grassmick draws the distinction that this man’s sickness is also an attempt to distort and destroy God’s image in man. In my opinion, I see so many correlations between the man in Mark chapter five, and African American men in today’s world. We are often taken from our families, placed in jail (graveyard), and locked up with shackles and chains. If we do not experience that, then while in the world we see daily how we continue to cut ourselves and hurt ourselves by hurting others. In fact, Tori DeAngelis quotes psychologists Jerry Tello, when he says, “Black and brown people kill ourselves because we’ve been indoctrinated [about how bad we are] and now we believe that; so that woundedness is very deep.”¹³

As a result, not only is the vector of developing competence taking place in Mark chapter five, but also the vector of helping the man establish personal identity. When in conversation with Jesus, Jesus asks the man, ““What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many”” (Mk. 5: 9). Jesus in a sense is asking this man to

¹² Grassmick, *Mark*, 122-123.

¹³ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

identify himself, and the man identify himself with what is possessing him. According to the Chickering Theory this identification is indeed what helps in the development of identity process. The fifth vector deals with the establishment of identity. "Development of identity is the process of discovering with what kinds of experience, at what levels of intensity and frequency, we resonate in satisfying, in safe, or in self-destructive fashion," argues Chickering.¹⁴ This development establishes how an individual is perceived by others.¹⁵ The man identifies himself as one who has many demons, because according to society that is exactly who he is. Returning to Jerry Tello's quote, since we have been indoctrinated to think Black people are the bad ones, we are weak, we are troublemakers, and we are the reason things are wrong in this world; this indoctrination has played an effect on how we relate to ourselves. Many prefer not to be known as Black, we try our best to extract ourselves from our culture and heritage. However, Chickering Theory is clear that, "the formation of one's identity leads to a sense of contentment with one's self and how that self is seen by others."¹⁶ Until, one becomes content with who they are, their identity will never develop, and then their identity will never be seen and accepted by others around them.

Finding Self

The project focus is based on this fact that if we provide a safe space and community for African American men, then they will develop an identity in and a

¹⁴ Chickering, "Chickering."

¹⁵ Chickering, "Chickering."

¹⁶ Chickering, "Chickering."

relationship with Jesus Christ. The more I reflected on that, the more I realize that the reality is we do not have to develop an identity in Jesus, because we already have our identity from Jesus. The issue is once again, our indoctrination, we do not recognize the God in us. Therefore, for my Theological Foundations Chapter, I focus on the theological term, the *imago dei*. *Imago Dei* means that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. For many, this does not intrigue them, because they carry more leverage with what society says about them, instead of the truth about them. As a result, while it is easy to connect the vector of establishing personal identity here, I think what we must also consider is transitioning from autonomy to interdependence. According to Chickering Theory, “The third vector is the movement through autonomy toward interdependence. Students must learn to operate on their own and take responsibility for themselves.”¹⁷ I think this is so important for African American males because we often want to put the blame on others. We put the blame on how we were raised. We put the blame on society. We put the blame on our significant others. However, when we move from autonomy to interdependence, we take responsibility for ourselves.

Chickering goes further and states:

It is important for students to find emotional and instrumental independence. Emotional independence means the ability of a student to willingly risk relationships of those who are close to them in exchange for pursuing their own individual interests or convictions. Instrumental independence is the ability to solve problems on one's own. Through this vector, students can manage the tensions between the need for independence and the need for acceptance, along with respecting the uniqueness and independence of others.¹⁸

¹⁷ Chickering, “Chickering.”

¹⁸ Chickering, “Chickering.”

I think Black men do things out of the desire to be accepted. Prime example is joining gangs and selling drugs at an early age. It is not so much for the hustle, but so they can be accepted by others and even respected by others. As a result, they will risk relationship with family and friends because they are convinced and convicted that they have to be a gang member or drug dealer to get respect.

Returning to the researchers who conducted the Manhood Development Program classes administered by the Oakland Unified School District, they discovered that, “To combat dominant images of black manhood, the identity constellations made available in Manhood Development Program classes placed a high value on relationships. Three key aspects of relational black masculinity were discussed: (1) how black men engage with their children, (2) how black men engage with women, and (3) how they interact with one another.”¹⁹ I think with developing identity for the black men it begins with them taking responsibility with those three aspects. I state this because often black men hear the words, “You aren’t any good!” “You just like your daddy;” or “You will never be anything in life.” Therefore, their identity is shaped on being like their no-good father, and this perspective effects who they become. However, if the goal is for them to take responsibility it also means giving them a different perspective.

Consequently, the Manhood Development Program, “painted a future where boys could be responsible black fathers and men entrusted with the care of family and relationships. The students could also look to their instructors’ relationships with their children as models of black fatherhood and imagine how they would teach, love, and care

¹⁹ Jarvis Givens, et al, “Modeling Manhood: Reimagining Black Male Identities in School - Diversity,” http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/modeling_manhood_reimagining_black_male_identities_in_school.pdf.

for their own children one day.”²⁰ The Manhood Development Program tried to help give a better perspective for these young men in the Oakland Unified School District about fatherhood and relationship with women. They do not have be “no good,” but instead can be responsible fathers who appreciate and love women and not subjugate them. By changing their perspective, it enlightens then their responsibility to do better and treat others around them better. It reminds me of the saying, that when you know better you do better.

Outlet and Development

It is evident that what I am trying to do in my project has become a focus over the years for other psychologists to do as well. Especially, concerning group therapy for African American men. This has become a major focus in the past several years, but for my historical foundations chapter, I focused on the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA). The YMCA was founded in London by George Williams. “When George Williams founded the first YMCA in Industrial Revolution-era London, he sought to create a supportive community to help young men like himself address pressing social challenges.”²¹ Granted the social challenges in London during the 1800s are not the same social challenges that we face today. The YMCA continues to be a place where people go to for empowerment, inspiration, and improvement. There are several YMCAs across the United States; and it is no longer just focused on helping young men, but now it consists of being a place to help the entire family.

²⁰ Jarvis Givens, et al, “Modeling Manhood.”

²¹The Y, “Our History.”

From my research about the YMCA, it was of much success until it reached the United States. Nina Mjagkij suggest that African Americans had to find their own YMCA because Whites excluded Blacks from their own YMCA. Mjagkij says, “The YMCA had excluded blacks from membership in white associations since its emergence in the United States in 1852. Despite this exclusion, the YMCA encouraged African Americans to establish their own associations and join the Christian brotherhood on “separate-but-equal” terms. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many African Americans, particularly the educated elite, responded with enthusiasm.”²² The YMCA is based off being a Christian organization, even had racism within itself. As a result, the African Americans then had to develop what the Chickering Theory calls, understanding the definition of integrity. Chickering’s seven and last vector is the development of integrity. Understanding the definition of integrity is “the ability for students to personalize humanizing values and apply them to their own behavior. The establishment of integrity is the ability for students to assemble and practice the values that are actually consistent with their own beliefs.”²³ African Americans understood that it was not fair or right to be excluded based off their race. As a result, to keep their integrity they established their own associations. History shows that these same established association were used to fight against racism and to be very instrumental in the Civil Rights Movement. They would use the YMCA buildings as places to host the meetings for the Civil Rights Movement.

²² Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 1.

²³ Chickering, “Chickering.”

Tori DeAngelis once again provides helpful connection with us as she quotes, Baron K. Rogers, a psychology doctoral student at the University of Akron in Ohio. Rogers says, “Culturally competent treatment for Black men also involves directly and therapeutically addressing issues of racism,”²⁴ As Black men, racism occurs every single day of our life. To not address it, means society does not care about the effects it is having on us. We see some type of racist incident everywhere we go. Whether it is from a woman clutching her bag closer to her when we get on the elevator to being followed around in the store. Black men experience racism. Our experience plays a role in how we personalize humanizing values on ourselves and others. As a result, if we see another black man while at the gas station, we constantly keep our guard up as our initial behavior. Once again, not understanding that we have been so deeply wounded by the indoctrination that has been passed down to us. We see each other as a threat and not as family or as a part of a larger community. This indoctrination makes the saying true that united we can stand, but divided we fall. As long as we continue to see each other as a threat, instead of a community we will continue to be divided.

African Americans did not just develop an understanding of the definition of integrity during these times of racism from the YMCA. African Americans also put into practice Chickering’s sixth vector of developing purpose. When one develops purpose, it comes through experiences that will help people discover what gives them energy, and what they find to be most fulfilling. “An individual has a strong outlook on professional life, makes meaning within his or her own interests, and establishes positive relationships

²⁴ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

with others.”²⁵ For the African Americans who were joining the YMCA, they saw their purpose to be fighting against racism and desegregate the YMCA. According to, Ninja Mjagkij states, “The Christian brotherhood did not challenge racism, discrimination, or segregation but embraced Jim Crowism.”²⁶

“Nevertheless, African Americans joined the YMCA in large numbers. They built their own associations and staffed them with black leaders. After establishing control over their associations, African Americans challenged Jim Crowism and pressured the YMCA to desegregate all of its facilities.”²⁷ African Americans then used their setback to help combat the issue at hand. While the YMCA encouraged and endorsed the African Americans to have their own associations, they would use this to help them fulfill their purpose. In my project, my hope is that through communication, they will also discover their purpose in life. Sometimes it takes being able to talk it through with peers to help them discover their purpose and then walk in it. If conversation takes place that can help them see things from all perspectives, then it will also shed light on their purpose. As stated, the goal is to create community where we develop and enhanced each other as best as we can.

Chickering Theory states, it is after only people come through experiences that they find their purpose. Baron K. Rogers agrees with using experiences to help in the development of identity. In fact, Tori DeAngelis quotes Baron K. Rogers saying, “That means making space for clients to identify racist incidents that they have experienced and

²⁵ Robinson, “Chickering's Seven Vectors of Identity Development.”

²⁶ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 1.

²⁷ Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 1-2.

the feelings that arise because of them, and, more important, to understand and work toward overcoming internalized racism.”²⁸ What Rogers is arguing is that if we do not address racism for African American men, they will never overcome the internalized racism. This is significant, because I think what keeps us chained is prejudices, stereotypes, injustice, discrimination, and a lot more. These are things we must uncover to develop the identity of African American men in a better way. Every black man is not a thug. Every black man is not a thief. Every black man is not a dead-beat dad. Every black man is not a womanizer. Black men have a purpose, and it is formed through their identity by which must be developed from their experience.

Discover, Discretion, and Determination

Development of one’s identity is not an easy task. However, I do believe that the Chickering Theory is effective and will be essential for my project. There will be multiple vectors of Chickering’s theory at work at one time. My fear is what if during my project there is a vector that one does not encounter or experience. I have reassurance though because “there is no set time, speed, or method for progression through these vectors. People may progress through them at whatever rate feels comfortable to them. At the same time, Chickering found that these vectors tend to interact with one another, which may cause an individual to change their perception of certain issues or events that have occurred from previous vectors.”²⁹ While my job maybe to help them navigate through each vector, their interaction and experience of life will be the ultimate

²⁸ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

²⁹ Chickering, “Chickering Theory Explained.”

determination of which vector they will interact with and when. It is my job to provide a safe space for the development to happen, and not force the development of identity to take place. Since there is no set time, I also recognize that the development may not take place within the time slot given for my project.

While the Chickering Theory is my focus for this project, I must also recognize that Chickering Theory was not only focused on black men. Therefore, I discovered Lisa Bowleg, PhD, a professor of applied social psychology at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., statement to be very beneficial as I take on this project. Bowleg is quoted as saying, ““Any effective mental health programs need to work with these men holistically and intersectionally,” she said. She also recommends focusing on these men’s strengths and assets—because many of their problems arise from external factors, not internal ones—and holding therapy groups specific to the sexual orientation and race of the men served.”³⁰ Just like my mental break did not happen until I begin to recognize everything that was happening around me, for most African American men the external factors of life play more into their mental state. It does not have to necessary be a racist event that happened to them but seeing racism on television can play a major role in their life. Everything in the life of the African American male affects the mental being of him. This is why Bowleg says that therapy must be holistic and intersectional. The goal is to make the African American male back to a whole state of being this includes physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and financially. Dealing with all aspects of what has plagued the African American men’s life and their indoctrination is required.

³⁰ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

Conversely, this task may cause issue. Black men already struggle with doing individual therapy because they do not want to deal with too much too fast. It is psychologist Erlanger “Earl” Turner, who says that “when a Black man does enter therapy, “it’s important to tread lightly as he starts to open up and share his emotions,” he said, “because if you push to discuss emotions too soon and he isn’t ready, he may decide not to return.””³¹ In other words, as I lead this project I must become very discreet with how I lead the conversations. I must be very careful not to push people to have conversation too fast. I must be careful not to overwhelm those who are not ready to have meaningful or in-depth conversations. It is all about their timing and the vectors they want to explore during our time together. Above all, my biggest hope is that from my project the men who gather will continue to gather outside of our time and even after my project is over. My desire is that they will find community within each other and become those who depend on each other.

³¹ DeAngelis, “Black Men’s Mental Health Matters.”

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

I have noticed in the confines of Shiloh Baptist Church, there was a great lack of community amongst the young male population. We have five to ten men under the age of forty that attend our church, but there is no comrade amongst the young men of the church. This only increased over the years during the coronavirus pandemic. The young men became isolated and did not fellowship with one another. During the pandemic, our attention was increased to social media and news that was happening around the world. In the news, these young African American men were seeing police brutality, black men around the United States being stalked and then shot and killed from other races, and black men crying out for their mothers while people put their knees on the back of their necks. Being isolated and not communicating or discussing what is going on in the world during this time was mentally, emotionally, and spiritually draining. This project was designed to help form a community where young men between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five can gather to just hang out and talk about things going on in their life and hopefully gain different insight and advice that can help them deal with things going on in the world or in their life. While also helping them create a foundation of keeping their faith and hopes in God and making sure their relationship with God grows and develops deeper through everything that they face and go through. The Man Cave will give men a safe space where they can find community and have conversation about life, then they

will acquire the information and tools necessary to create friendships with one another as well as developing a deeper relationship with God.

The research involving biblical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations have been used to formulate and develop this ministry project. This research help provide insight on how to create a safe space for the young men. Implementing a safe space of community for young men is important because the pandemic has impacted their mental and spiritual well-being. The pandemic is something none of them has ever gone through before. Then for them to have experienced seeing unjust treatment towards men their age around our country has also affected them. Therefore, the need for a place where they can understand how they are feeling and then share those feelings with others without judgement is needed.

The biblical foundations chapter is based upon the biblical text Mark 5: 1-20. This biblical text shines a light on a man who is demon possessed and lives in the graveyard. Since he lives in the graveyard, he has isolated himself away from family, friends, and those in the community. It is not clear what has happened in his life for him to now be living in the graveyard, but whatever the reason is he is there in the text. However, an encounter with Jesus and the development of their relationship changed his life. It results in the man becoming clothed and in his right mind. Then Jesus tells him, go home to your friends because community is important and encouraged by Jesus for both this man and other young men. In the implementation of “Man Cave: Creating a Community for Men,” it was challenging. Community is more than just family and relatives. It is also inclusive of friends.

Those in the context must understand that community must start with those who are sharing with them in this project and experience. They must first develop relationships that will go beyond this project. Every person should be able to identify who is a part of their community. It should be people they trust, people they can be open and honest with, and people that can help them in their development process. When we look at Mark chapter five, the man does not remain the same, he develops from this demon possessed man to someone who is in their right mind. Nevertheless, the influence of his development was the fact that he was willing to have a conversation with Jesus. There is something about Jesus that he identifies with. The Bible is clear, everyone else tries to chain him up and bound him, but Jesus has a conversation with him. This conversation is based upon helping the man understand his identity, him recognizing Jesus, and then him discovering his community. This project will engage men in conversation that will help them acquire the information and tools necessary to create friendships with one another as well as developing a deeper relationship with God.

For this project, I must collect data that shows a difference in conduct and analyze the results that prove the difference from participants engaging in the Man Cave. My goal is to focus on analyzing and assessing their growth in their relationship with God, but more important if they have better insight on developing friendship amongst others. If they receive these tools, they will develop healthy relationships and have a safe community. These tools can be effective for all relationship and growth areas in their life.

Surveys and questions are the best method to help with acquiring information, which can further lead to discussions on where they are and what they think must become better in their life. The real accuracy of information will be discovered through the pre-

assessment questionnaire and the post-assessment questionnaire. These questionnaires will help gather insight on the participants definition of community and who they believe is a part of their personal community. There will be resources and information shared to help shed light on how to form and develop relationships, as well as how to deepen their relationship with God. The questionnaire will consist of true and false items and short answers. Both are necessary to give full insight into understanding the participants thoughts and their willingness to develop their character.

After the post-assessment questionnaire is completed, it will help inform if the man cave was insightful and helpful with providing the young men what they needed. It will consist of questions examining if they believe their relationship amongst each other has become better. It will also give them accountability to constantly continue working on their personal and professional development. Furthermore, the assessment will help with the establishment of what it looks like to have a deeper relationship with God. What they feel will help them continue to develop in their relationship with God. As well as what spiritual disciplines they feel are necessary for them to practice.

Throughout most of the sessions and implementation of the project, I will engage in conversations with my participants. I do not want to only teach and ask survey questions. Instead, I want to dialogue with them and have real life conversations with them to help with their development and growth process. This will cause for them to reach in their inner selves and become vulnerable with those in the group to have sincere conversation. From these conversations, I hope to gain insight and clarity on who they are and that they gain insight and clarity about me. This conversation and dialogue will take place over six week-long sessions focusing on their emotional, social, and physical well-

being. I still try my best to understand them and help them understand where they are in life as well as the next steps and process for their lives.

My hope is that through our dialogue about life, we can find a balance of understanding God and understanding the development process for young men. It is through honest and open conversation that I will discover more about the participants and understand their background and help them navigate through these troubling times we are faced with as African American men. The significance for me is I can offer perspective from the fact that I was not raised in El Paso like many of them were. Therefore, I can give a well needed outsider perspective but also connected perspective to help them see their issue and current world in a different perspective. Furthermore, I believe these conversations will lead to developing a way I can help disciple each of these young men individually. Helping them form their faith, and what that looks like for them in a world that is filled of non-believers. As well as providing them with assistance on how to stay rooted in their faith and walk with Christ while also being a witness and light for others that are in their generation. It is a long-term goal of possibly not just being mentee or disciplined by me, but they will develop where they can become a mentor and help someone else that is either their age or younger.

The purpose of my project is to make a safe space and community for young men between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five. In order to make this space safe, I believe that it has to be as informal as possible. As a result, besides conversation, I will likewise engage in conversation over a meal. It is my belief that relationships are formed over food. There are plenty of times in the Bible where Jesus ate food that led to a relationship being formed. According to Matthew 9:10, Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house,

many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. Even though the pharisees and scribes teased Jesus about eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus reminds them that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. This should likewise be our attitude, willing to eat food with those who need a relationship with Jesus but understanding that it starts with first us forming a relationship with them.

Although conversations, meals, and surveys are all tools that will help guide the implementation process, there is a necessity to look at scripture to help the participants see things from a biblical perspective. As a result, each session will be conducted in person and will deal with following topics:

Session One: Understanding Christ, Church, and Community

Session Two: How do you handle stress? (1 Kings 19: 1-4)

Session Three: A Forsaken God (Matthew 27: 45-47)

Session Four: Family Matters and Issues (Mark 5: 1-20)

Session Five: Creating Community (Mark 5: 1-5)

Session Six: Church: A Clique or Community?

Through these series of sessions, I will likewise deal with the interdisciplinary foundation, theological foundation, biblical foundation, and historical foundation research and connect them to show the participants how all of it connects. By showing the connection through research and practical application, I will be able to prove the effectiveness of this project.

Implementation

In the past few months, the church has remodeled the old parish, and turned it into classrooms and an area for our Young Adults. As a result, during the time of project implementation, I decided to occupy the Young Adult room to have my sessions. The implementation date for the man cave for this project was held every Thursday, starting on February 9, 2023, through March 23, 2023. Before the actual start date of the man cave, the church's graphic designer provided a flyer requesting participants. They were informed that they had to complete the United Theological Seminary (UTS) Consent form before or by Wednesday, February 8, 2023. This flyer was announced and displayed on our video announcements for the church twice before the project implementation began, and every week during the project's implementation.

Session one was held on Thursday, February 9, 2023. Unfortunately, this session did not have a great turn out. In fact, no one showed up for the session. As a result, I begin to doubt how successful and effective this project would be. I did feel as if I did not give the participants enough time to contact and ask question to inquire about the purpose of this "man cave." In fact, after I spoke to one participant, he said he did not know what to expect, so as a result, he decided to avoid and put off coming. When that was made clear to me, I understood that making a video announcement during worship was not enough. So, I took another approach of personally calling and texting all the young men between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five that was connected to the church.

When I called or texted each person individually, I was able to answer any questions or address any hesitations that they had concerning the sessions. Many just was unsure about what would happen during these sessions. As a result, I had to make it clear

and known that ultimately these sessions were to give them a space to talk and connect. Especially since most of the time, only gather for Sunday morning worship, and we leave Sunday and do not see each other until the following Sunday. I also informed them that the main three things that will take place is creating community, having conversation, and developing relationship with Christ. It is out of this conversation, that many was able to decide whether they wanted to come to the sessions or not.

I texted the individuals leading up to the next scheduled session. I even made sure to text them on the day of the session so that they would be aware of the excitement and expectation of them coming to these sessions. Session two was held on Thursday, February 16, 2023, and this session two young men showed up. I was encouraged that they showed up. I handed them the pre-assessment surveys while we waited on the food. I went over them and reviewed them quickly for a few minutes when they completed them. We then sat down and dine together over Pizza Hut. I can tell that they still seemed unsure and uncomfortable. Even I, myself, felt uncomfortable about how these sessions would turn out. So, I began with letting them know it was informal, and I opened with jokes and a time of laughter. Through this I was able to release some of the tension, and as we begin to eat, we engaged in conversation. Since we were one week behind, I skipped immediately to centering our conversation around stress. To break the ice even more, I told them my story of the events that were taking place during covid, which was right before I arrived in El Paso to pastor. I talked about how I was dealing with depression and suicidal thoughts.

After sharing, Participant One shared how he has also dealt with depression and suicidal thoughts. He stated how he also felt like he could not share that he was depressed

because of how he was raised. Depression was not something discussed and if it was it was talked about in a negative way. Participant One admitted that when he was younger, he used to cut his wrist and that is why he would always wear long sleeve shirts to cover them up. He also shared how working from home had isolated him. He already felt isolated since he is the only child, but now he was even more isolated from the world. He also stated that it was during the pandemic his grandfather got gravely ill; and it resulted in them placing the grandfather in a rehabilitation center. The issue is the participant now could not hug and comfort his grandfather as he had done before the pandemic.

On the same hand, Participant Two shared how it was during the pandemic that he graduated from high school. Therefore, to graduate from high school and unable to celebrate a notable accomplishment was stressful for him. It affected him so much that he decided to wait to pursue his college degree because he was uncertain about the times. He decided play videogames, eat, and smoke marijuana during most of the pandemic. He admits that it became a bad habit of his during the pandemic that now he feels like during stressful times in his life, he must smoke marijuana to feel better. He also admitted that he tried not to become addicted to drugs or alcohol because he watched his father when he was younger be addicted to alcohol and that played a huge effect on their relationship. He shared how he remember times of waking up to his dad passed out drunk. This is why ultimately; he would move to live with his grandparents.

This then prompted me to ask the question what are your crutches, how do they handle stress and or stressful situations? Participant two already admitted that his crutch was smoking, but he also stated that he drinks, but not often. The only reason why he does not drink often is because every time he does drink, terrible things happen. With his

avoidance of trying not to be like his dad, he discovered that slowly he was still ending up like him. He also discussed how he feels like no one understands what he is going through, so he does not talk about it. He would rather smoke or drink to get over it. He also stated that there were people, including his grandparents, that just do not get it or him.

Participant One agreed with Participant Two that he also feel like people do not understand him or anything he goes through. Especially since he is the only child, and he somewhat has been sheltered his whole life away from people. Participant One admitted that his coping mechanism for stress was sex. Especially during the moments when he had the house to himself during the pandemic, he would always invite someone over while his parents was at work. Participant One also stated that although his whole family was dealing with the illness and decline of his grandfather, he mentally is not ready. He admitted that while his grandmother has informed the family, that should has come to terms with his grandfather dying and said that she will be ok with it. He has personally tried to tell them that he would not be and as a result this is why he feels like they do not understand.

While listening to them, I encouraged them to look with me at the life of Elijah. Elijah in 1 Kings chapter nineteen was also suicidal. In fact, he asked God to help with assisted suicide. However, the scripture goes on to say that Elijah falls to sleep under a tree. Sometimes, we just need rest. Stressful situations normally occur when we are not well rested. I also shed light for them how it was through the angel that God sent that he found strength. Elijah was also stressed out because he thought he was the only one, that there was nobody around that understood what he was going through. Yet God had to

remind him I have 7,000 more. I encouraged them that there are people that do understand, but they will never understand for sure until you have the conversation and become vulnerable.

Session three was held on Thursday, February 23, 2023, and this session the two young men that showed up the week before, came back. This week we feasted over Wing Stop and began our session recapping our week and talking about Elijah. We then advanced the conversation to the subject of being forsaken or forgotten by God. The focus of this conversation was on their relationship with God. Did they feel their relationship with God was void or on pause? What was their prayer life like? This will be the start of understanding what role God plays in their life.

Participant Two began by informing the group that if he was honest, he did not have a faithful or stable prayer life. He admitted that he knows he should pray, but he does not. His grandmother has always encouraged and informed him to pray about all things. However, he thinks that prayer is not effective and will not help him with life. It is almost as if he believed that prayer or the response of God answering prayer takes too long. He would rather have a microwave God that answers his prayers as soon as he says amen. As Participant Two shared more, he also shared that his impatience with God makes it seem more of that he has strayed away from God instead of God forsaking or forgetting about him. Participant Two struggles with his walk with God because he has been very much influenced by the world and by culture. Therefore, when it comes to talking to God, he is not sure how to talk to and or listen to God as well, resulting in what he says consistent problems and trials.

Participant One agreed with Participant Two but stated that he does have a prayer life. His issue is that he often feels like his prayers hit the ceiling and do not go any further than that. Suggesting that he struggles with believing that God hears his prayers. This thought of prayers bouncing off the ceiling and returning to the people is not a new thought. In fact, this thought I have heard several other of my Young Adults share with me that this is something they struggle with. Participant One shared though that despite his doubts about God hearing his prayers, he continues to pray because that is what he has always been taught to do. He shared there have been moments in his life though where he has seen God answer his prayer, but majority of the time he wrestles with the thought of if his prayers get any further than the roof.

Both participants mentioned about being taught to pray. As a result, I engaged in dialogue about if they are a Christian because that is all they have been taught. Or if they were a Christian because they had a for sure relationship with God. This conversation provided insight to their history with family, God, and the church. Participant One stated that he grew up in a house where his mother and father sang in the choir and his father was a deacon in the church. Therefore, he stayed in church all day and every day. He would always go with them to all church and choir engagements. Likewise, his maternal grandfather was the assistant to the pastor and interim pastor before my predecessor. While all he knew was church, he was not sure through conversation if he was certain about a relationship with God. I think he has more assurance in his connection with his religion more than his relationship with Christ. Although he has been baptized, and he is clear what it means to be saved. There are still areas in his life that are needed for

development and growth spiritually. The question then becomes does he want to grow spiritually or is he ok with his current situation.

Participant two jumped into the conversation and began to share his struggle with his relationship with God. He shared how he was raised in the church, but there were events that happened to him that ultimately led him to leaving the church and turning to the world. Participant Two was raised by his paternal grandparents. His grandparents always took him to church when he was younger. When he became a teenager, he was not as active in the church. It was during this time, his grandfather became a pastor. In support of his grandfather, he would go to church with them, but he saw how bad the church treated his grandfather. This resulted in him, looking at the church as bad, but also it effected his relationship with God. He struggled to understand how these were so called “Christians,” but they did not behave or act like God. If they were acting like God, why would one develop and be in a relationship with this type of God that is mean, rude, and disrespectful.

This was the perfect time and opportunity for me to transition the conversation from them to now a focus on Jesus and his relationship with God. It is Jesus who while on the cross feels forsaken by God. Theologians suggest that the reason God turns his back on Jesus is because of the sins of the people that Jesus was carrying on him. In other words, Jesus’ relationship with God was affected because of church people. It suggests that although people should have a strong relationship with God, religion still does play an important role into the relationship that people have with God. Yet there should also be noted that by the end of the crucifixion, Jesus’ relationship with God was stronger than his religion. I encouraged them there will be moments where our religion will fail us, our

religion will not always have the answers. Therefore, we must commit and dedicate ourselves to always deepening and developing our relationship with God. It is only through our relationship with God that we can sustain through the troubles of the world and those situations that are going on around us.

As we continue to meet each week, I had to adjust our day of meeting from Thursday to Friday due to an already scheduled meeting. As a result, session four was held on Friday, March 3, 2023, and even though it was an adjustment made, they both still came backed. This week we hoped in my car and took a drive to the nearest Subway. I wanted to get them out of the comfort zone in the church, I had a feeling that although they had been very open with me; they still only saw me as their pastor. So, seeing me outside of the church will allow them to see me in a different light. This week's conversation was centered on family and the role does family play in their lives. I wanted to discover how important is family to them and what kind of relationship or impact their family have on their life.

Participant Two had already shared how he was living with his grandparents, and he really did not have the best relationship with his parents. He shared how he has been emotionally affected from his relationship with his father. He shared that his father has made a great life for himself, but he has not been essential in helping him make it. His father has not helped with school or helped guide him in life. He briefly shared that he has seen though, at a young age, his father wrestle and deal with an alcohol addiction. This addiction has also become one that he deals with. He also shared that he does not have the best relationship with his mother. It was unclear what happened between them when he was younger, but now he puts the blame on them not developing a better

relationship because she never wants to come and see him; she lives in another city.

When she is in town, she makes it extremely difficult for them to gather and meet because it always must be on her terms in on her timing. I can sense that he was frustrated, but most of all hurt. In fact, the more he talked, he began to cry and breakdown. It was at this moment that I felt a breakthrough in our relationship because he allowed himself to become vulnerable with me and the group. As he spoke, I realized that his hurt was rooted deep, and because of this he really felt like the black sheep and was not dealing with his emotions or feelings in a healthy manner.

Participant One's family experience is similar but unique as well. Participant One informed me he considers his family to be his parents, his maternal aunt, and his maternal grandparents. He admitted he has a maternal uncle that lives in the same city, but he does not like his uncle's wife; therefore, he does not see or spend much time with them. He informed me that there was tension with his family and theirs because the uncle's wife was disrespectful to his grandmother; and it is their belief that since she is matriarch of the family, she should respect her more. He also shared with us that he does not know his aunts, uncles, and cousins of his grandparents. He knows that he has some, but he has not met them; and he does not want to meet them because he is ok with his small cohesiveness of family.

As I tried to explore this thought more, I inquired about his fear of possibly dating or even marrying one of his family members. He informed me that it had happened, but luckily, they found out before anything physical happened between them. With this information, I did encourage him to get to know his family outside of the small group that here in El Paso. For the longest, I thought that Participant One was the only child, but I

discovered that his father has two other sons, one of which he does speak to once or twice a week. I was very intrigued about the lack of trying to develop and formulate the relationships with his siblings. It gave me insight that his inner circle of family maybe the black sheep of a bigger family. I also discovered that his family really in a sense had sheltered him. His mother had a child before him, but the child died during pregnancy. Therefore, when Participant One was born, they kept him near to them and she over protected him so nothing could happen. This is really the reason why they took him with him to all the church events; and why he was raised in the church. What I am unsure about is if raising him in the church helped him or hurt him. I raise this because of the reality that yes, he has religion, and yes because of their love for him they continue to push him out in front, but I do sense that he is not living in his true-identity and self. As a result, I will engage in better dialogue in our next session about being our true selves and if our community know the real us or the one, we portray.

Our next session was held on our normal day of meeting and session five was held on Thursday, March 9, 2023. I began by sharing some good news and some bad news. The good news was that these sessions have been beneficial and great for both the participants and me. The bad news was that we only had one more session to go. We then discussed how our week had been. I wanted to engage in this week's conversation because we had death in our church family. It was a longtime trustee who was raised in the church and very essential in the program, production, and development of our church. Besides the pastor, he was the second man. He impacted all members including the two participants. Therefore, I wanted to engage them in discussing how they were feeling and help explore and understand their emotions. I wanted to show them that they can have

healthy dialogue and expressions of their emotions. It was after our discussions about emotions that I shifted gears to discuss about Jesus and the church. Although this subject was planned for session six, I thought it would have been best to start the conversation this week, since we were being impacted with events that were taking place in our church. As a result, I wanted to engage in dialogue about how they felt about the church? Do they consider the church apart of their community? What role does the church play in their lives? I also wanted to see if they thought that the church they belonged to, was a good representation of Jesus. If it was not, what do they think needs to be changed for it to be the church that exhibits Jesus.

Participant Two was very eager to engage in this conversation. Participant Two had already shared that when his grandfather was a pastor, and the church mistreated his grandparents. This played a major role in the relationship between God and him. He really believed that the church his grandfather pastored was not a good representation of Christ. They just did not support or believe in the vision as a church. He then transitioned to discussing about how when he was younger and he attended Shiloh, he now looks back and recognizes that the church then had issues and was not a representation of Christ either. They had many cliques and gossipers that belonged to the church. He discussed how the youth back then was not treated fairly. They had no voice or opinion, but they would always be happy and highlight the youth to make themselves feel good as if they were doing something. He admitted that as he grows older, he expects a church to be more loving and welcoming to everyone. He also stated that he does see a change in Shiloh, and he complimented my hard work for shifting the dynamics and the culture of the church. The culture of the church is still shifting as more of the old regime leaves and

there is a new regime joining who desire a deep authentic relationship with God. From this new regime I can build a healthier culture that loves and serve God, their church, and even their pastor.

Participant One agreed with Participant Two that the culture of Shiloh is changing. He shared how when he looks at the development of the church, he admits that he did not know there were issues in the church he grew up in. On the other hand, he witnessed it as he grew older. Many of his peers that he grew up with in Shiloh, left Shiloh because of the judgmental people. They experienced church hurt from someone in the church, and it cause them to leave the church. While some every now and then come back, majority of them have not returned and do not desire to return because of the hurt that they have experienced. So, this culture change signifies progress and the potential of new experience they can have. He also shared with me that he wrestles with seeing the church as a part of his community because he does not like everybody. I wanted to dig further into why, and when I did it ultimately came down to their freedom to be their authentic self.

Participant One had been hiding his true identity from his family and even a church family. Even though I knew what he was trying to say, he could not admit to it until a few minutes had pass. Eventually, he did tell the group and I that he was homosexual. Since he was a homosexual, he did not know or understand how his family, or the church would accept him. It was interesting to me though that even though he claims that only his father and auntie knew that he still included his entire inner circle family in his community but left the church out. I suggested that essentially what he was doing was allowing the fact that other people can live in their truth, but he could not live

in his truth cause hatred and jealousy towards them. Until he started living in his truth, he would always despise others. Therefore, he had to decide on whether to start living in his truth or continue to despise people for no apparent reason.

As we closed for the evening, I tried to remind them that community is essential and important. It was indeed my friends that helped me in my time of depression and despair. I shared with them how it was during the pandemic, when we were supposed to be sheltering in place that my friends and I would gather at each other houses and still play spades. We would gather and try to forget about the fact that there was a global pandemic going on. Despite what was happening around us, we ignored it to help each other find commonality and peace within ourselves. It was in these moments that I was able to find common ground and a sense of normalcy where I did not have to wear a mask or make any changes that the pandemic brought along. In fact, I remember once before we played, we sanitized the cards by wiping them down with Lysol wipes. This just made them stick to each other. I look back and laugh at it now because we did it as a joke, because we were still breathing around each other with no mask. However, that moment was needed for me so I can keep a little sense of sanity and peace in my life with being around friends.

Our last session was held on Thursday, March 16, 2023. Although it had been a long week for the church and I had to do the funeral services of the trustee that passed away, I wanted to still engage and meet this week with the participants. Especially since it was the last one, I wanted to get intel and feedback about how they felt about the community that we had formed here. After this I wanted to engage in conversation about their personal communities before this community was developed. From this I discovered

who they allowed in their community and who they shared their secrets with. Then I wanted the participants to take the post-assessment survey to see their progress and where they stood after the sessions concerning God and community. I will then analyze the post-assessment from the pre-assessment and discover similarities and differences in the both.

Participant Two shared how in all honesty because of this relationship with his dad, the lack of communication between his brother and himself, he believed he needed this community. It allowed him to be around other men and discuss what he is going through while also receiving information that helped him in the development of his manhood. He shared how this community played a major role and helping him address emotions, thoughts, and confusion that he had in his life. He felt like he did not have anyone that he can go to and share what was bothering him. Especially since often he feels a disconnect between his grandparents and himself. Therefore, to have this space with men around his same age to help trust, rely on, and confide in was very important for him. He further stated that the time spent in this community was well worth it and will continue to develop the relationship outside even after the completion of the project.

Participant One agreed that the community developed here for the past few weeks was a necessity as well for him. He shared how although he has brothers, he is treated like the only child by his family. This has caused some tension between his actual brothers and himself. He felt a sense of sincerity and safety among this community. He stated how he wish that I did this before now and did it when I first arrived as pastor. He also shared how he is disappointed that the project was ending, but suggested we keep meeting outside of the project period. I sensed that for him this gathering was a great way

for him to get out the house and away from his parents. The break and breather for his parents seem to be of much necessity for him. For although he loved his parents and his inner circle family, he did not always share everything with them. Inclusive of not being his genuine self around them, he always had to put on an act or portrayal of someone else. However, here in this community he discovered that he can be his real authentic self. However, this was still a struggle for him because for most of his life and day he has had to “fake it.”

It was at this moment that I begin to transition the conversation around the communities that they have outside of the one that was created here. Participant one shared that his family is mostly a part of his community. As well as a few friends from work that he hangs out with every now and again. I was intrigued that he did not mention anyone from church being a part of his community. When I questioned him about it, he brushed it off to say yea he would include some of the people from the church a part of his community. I decided to dig further and helping to share light about the truth concerning community. I stated to the group to have a real community means that you can be sincere, vulnerable, truthful, and real within that community. Then, I suggested to Participant One that could he really include his family a part of his community if he could not be his authentic self with them. He shared how his mother and grandparents did not know about him being a homosexual. He further admitted that he sneaks around trying to do things behind their backs, like when they are at work. Essentially, he realized that he did not have a real community that he can identify with and say that he was authentically apart of besides this one.

Participant Two shared that he had a community of friends, but the issue he had with them is they seem to be more about drama than helping in the development of one another. Instead of talking about their emotions and their thoughts, they get together to drink alcohol and smoke weed together. Realizing that, these methods of coping does not help in relieving the pain but just intensify the realization of their pain. Participant Two even shared that there have been times when they were hanging out at a bar or club and because they were two drinks away from passing out, they would often see anger appear amongst his friends. There have been times when he got angry and was getting ready to fight a group of people, only to discover that the people he called “friends” were nowhere to be found. He stated that if they were true friends and a part of a healthy cultural and community that he should always be able to depend on them no matter the situation. Even if it is a situation that he put himself into that is going to cause him trouble and more problems.

At the same time, I decided to share with both participants that they both share accurate positions and points concerning community. I tried to help them understand that communities will only be effective and as strong as we are. In other words, the communities we are a part of are the ones that we choose to create. I shared how I am a preacher, so I have a community of preacher friends. In this community we talk about church, we discuss sermons, we pray for one another, and we encourage and support each other. This group of community is essential to be being the pastor and preacher that I am in this life. Then I have a community of fraternity brothers. We are connected through our love for our fraternity. Our fraternity motto is, “To better The Man.” Therefore, when we get together, we enjoy each other’s company, but likewise we get together to help

ensure the betterment of each brother so that the brotherhood can become better. We help each other and support each other to the best of our ability. Not just for those that we went through the fraternity with, but also future potential brothers who will join the fraternity in years to come.

Each community that I am a part of is because of the person that I am. Ultimately, what I tried to suggest to the participants is that who you are will form your community. Therefore, they must make wise decisions about their life and about their future, and when they do that, they must make the decision to surround themselves with people who will help them become the best version of themselves that they are trying to become. For example, before I was a pastor, I hung out with pastors. Now that I am a pastor, I lean to and depend on lessons I learned and things I was taught to help me pastor the people of God. Community is not just about who they can be themselves around, but who can help make you better as well.

Session six was our last session of teaching and conversation. However, I wanted to give them a week of us just hanging out and fellowshiping with one another. As a result, on Saturday, March 25, 2023, we all went to bowling together. Once again, this was an opportunity for them to see me outside of the church and to see me as other than pastor. It showed them that as we hope to continue to develop this community that I am being open and vulnerable with them and not just being a pastor to them. We enjoyed our time with laughter and entertainment, allowing each other to see that this community is needed for all and that out of this community we can likewise have fun and address our emotions and concerns.

Summary of Learning

The participants were all young men between the ages of twenty to twenty-five within my context. For the project, two young men volunteered to participate in the development of the man cave so a community can be created. Each participant came from same geographical backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and even shared similar familiar history. Each young man was still living with their guardian even though they were past the age of adulthood. They both were born and raised in El Paso. Both young men worked, and one of them were just starting back attending college.

The primary goal in this man cave is to provide a community where those who attend can find a space where they can be vulnerable and learn how to develop relationship with each other and with God. There is a lack of community between the participants. The only time spent together are on Sunday morning in worship. Ultimately, I will give them a platform that will enable them to start doing life together. They will have the ability to develop friendships amongst one another and help in each other's development. To develop relationship, they must spend time outside of Sunday mornings with each other. This will lead to them also helping in the discipling of each other allowing them to deepen their relationship with God. This is something that was clearly noticeable and defined through their pre- and post-survey. It was discovered that young men need community to be discipled and create a deeper relationship with God.

Community Assessment

Individuals provided a clear understanding and definition of their beliefs through the pre-survey questions about community. One hundred percent of the participants

defined community as a group that comes together to get things accomplished. However, only fifty percent reported that they consider the church to be a part of their personal community. This was no surprise since there is a lack of community and family atmosphere at Shiloh Baptist Church. The youth and young adults do not feel as if they belong. One participant even reported in the survey that as it relates to their experience with the church, they stated how they have renewed hope because of the more attention given to the youth and young adults. There was clearly no attention or special development geared to the youth and young adults. They were not discipled and as a result their spiritual maturity and growth is lacking. As a result, churches all around the United States, especially African American churches, have seen young adults leave the church when they go off to college. There must be at some point where youth and young adult discipleship becomes an essential program in the church and not just their membership. If they are discipled at a young age than they will not fall away. In the community there must be a focus on development of self, a deeper relationship with God, and discovering new friendships.

Development of Self

It was discovered that zero percent of participants could report that in their communities that they are one hundred percent honest with those in their communities. They reported that on an average there is seventy five percent of honesty shared in their communities. The inability to be their genuine and authentic self, amongst those who they have accepted as being a part of their community suggest that they must portray someone they are not. This causes a hinderance on them being or discovering who they

really are. We learned from research that when someone is in the early adulthood years of eighteen to twenty-five years old, that they are in the most crucial and essential years of self-discovery. Discovering their identity should then proceed to the forming of communities that embrace, promote, and enhance their identity. Unfortunately, they are allowing the communities they are in to form them. Therefore, this has led to an identity crisis of the question being asked, who am I?

Deeper Relationship with God

A significant number of the participants grew up in the church, and or had been a part of the church for most of their life. The issue is, although they had been in the church, they had not formulated a healthy and stable relationship with God. They lacked fundamental spiritual discipline like prayer, reading scripture, and meditating. It is not that they had not been taught it, but rather there was no emphasis placed on the importance of doing it to develop their relationship with God. There had always been emphasis placed on attending church and cultivating relationship with other people. Nonetheless, what happens when people disappoint or make you mad, which is the case which in return many people left Shiloh and do not have a desire to come back. The man cave emphasized them reading and studying the Bible, as well as making prayer a priority. Fifty percent of participants reported an increase in their prayer life and their studying of God's word, while the other fifty percent just reported an increase in one area of the spiritual disciplines.

Discovering New Friendships

Development of self and having a deeper relationship with God plays an essential role for young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years old. It is vital that in those years they are understanding who they are and what role God plays in their life. Furthermore, it was discovered that community and a group of friends are needed to help in the forming of both. As a result, we tried to set a consistent time where we could gather to have conversation about life, but also study God's word together. Each participant acknowledged that their relationship with God could be better, but they did not have a community to help formulate a better relationship with God. By the conclusion of the Man Cave, while they admitted that they had a better spiritual discipline and was continuing to grow in their relationship with God, they credited their new group of friends formed in the man cave to helping assist in it. All participants had form personal relationships with each other, as well as, with me. Conversations were had in how the man cave should continue and how they could possibly invite others to participate and attend. In response, until something was set, I provided additional resources and books that could assist and helping them develop as a man and deepen their relationship with Christ.

Conclusion

I believe that the project was needed and went smoothly. Even though the first week I did not have any participants to attend, by week two, the participants were more engaged after understanding the purpose and process of it. In my sessions, I was able to provide conversations and discussions that were tailored around the situations and

circumstances that the participants were facing in their own lives. With the pressure of the world, it is inferred that men should have it all together especially by the ages of eighteen to thirty-five years old. It is expected for us to have it together financially, mentally, spiritually, and physically. Unfortunately, this pressure causes a lot of people to have breakdowns if they do not have it all together. Not realizing that it is in these development years that they are beginning to get it and it is beginning to form. However, because we often do not talk about it, we do not realize that we are not the only ones going through the pressure. Therefore, I felt as if it was my responsibility to provide the platform and community where we can discuss our issues as well as share information that can help us be relieved from the pressures that are placed on us.

The research and writing of the foundational chapters were very important in helping me understand how to navigate and discover ways of engaging in the conversation with young men about their life, and spiritual walk with God. Engaging in the work of many scholars, I was able to see viewpoints and insight from those who help me see things from not just one who is under the pressure, but one who can overcome the pressure as well. From doing the exegetical work in my biblical foundation paper, I was able to see that men do not just have a mental breakdown for no reason; there is something about not having community that plays a very important role in their breakdown. Do men have a place where they can be vulnerable and find support to help them with what they are facing. It was in the historical foundation chapter that I discovered that at one point of time the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) was created to provide a community for young men.

In the interdisciplinary foundation chapter, I learned, using this proposed project that it will also help in the development of the young men. This chapter emphasized Arthur Chickering Theory. Chickering Theory provides seven vectors of development when it comes to identity development. Henceforth, the project will not just develop community, but it will also help the young men find their identity through community. I think this is very important because even as I continue to discover who I am and my likes and dislikes, engaging them in identity will be helpful to me discovering my identity.

If we desire to see our young men grow and develop, we must continue to provide for them spaces where they can develop and form friendships that can help them deal with everything they will have to encounter in life. This is the purpose and goal of this project, to just begin setting a community for them. Nonetheless, this safe space must be formed by them outside and after the project is completed to really be effective and work. The curriculum I developed for the group at Shiloh Baptist Church was subsequently successful after the initiation of sessions. The model I believe is one that anyone can take and use and help them to begin to create safe spaces for their young men. It is my hope that from this project, I can encourage others to form communities. I would note that it does not have to be just for young men, but young women as well. However, I would separate them, just so that the young men can be able to speak open and freely about things that they may not want to discuss in front of young women. This model provides a valuable resource on how to form community and have conversation that can develop themselves, deeper their relationship with God, and help them discover new friendships. There will always be room for future work as there will always be new information and understanding of community and how that will affect men.

APPENDIX A

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY CONSENT FORM

Investigator Name: Christopher C. White

Contact Information: Cell: [REDACTED]

Email: revccwhite@gmail.com

Introduction: I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary.

Purpose: I am conducting a study on creating a community for men between the ages of 20 to 30 years old to see what effect if any it will have on their relationship with God and their spiritual maturity.

Requirements for Participation: You are invited because you are a male between the ages of 20 to 30 years old who lives in El Paso, Texas.

Procedures: If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to: attend focus groups for an hour to an hour and half over the course of 6-8 weeks at Shiloh.

Human Subject participation: All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study.

Risks: There are no known risks to you in this study and confidentiality will be maintained throughout its use.

Benefits: The benefits are that participants will find a place of community where they can share and discuss life with other young men while also receiving tools that can help them develop a stronger relationship with God.

Voluntariness: Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your membership in the congregation or whatever else you think this study may have an impact upon. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, or electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality: We will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be encrypted, and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name used.

Summary: If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me.

Signature: Signing this paper means that you have read this, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to Participate in the Project/Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What is your definition of community?
- 2) Who do you consider a part of your community?
- 3) Can you share in a few sentences your experience and relationship with God?
- 4) Can you share in a few sentences your experience with the church?
- 5) Do you have any clubs, groups, or associations you attend with other men that are your age?
- 6) What are some of your coping mechanisms to deal with stress? Family? Work?
- 7) Do you believe you have a great stable and or developing relationship with God?
- 8) On a scale 1-10, with 10 being the most likely, how would you rate your ability to share with your friends and or community how you feel?
- 9) On a scale 1-10, with 10 being always, how honest are you with those in your community?
- 10) What are some key principles you think are necessary with development and growth in your life?

Participant No: _____

APPENDIX C

POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Would you consider those who participated in the Man Cave with you now a part of your community?
- 2) What do you feel about continuing to attend a Man Cave?
- 3) How effective do you think attending this Man Cave was?
- 4) How has your spiritual journey evolved over the time spent attending the Man Cave?
- 5) Is your current relationship with God better or worse since attending the Man Cave?
- 6) What are some takeaways you've learned from attending the Man Cave?
- 7) What would you like to see happen next from our experience together?
- 8) On a scale 1-10, with 10 being the most likely, how would you rate your ability to share with those who attended the Man Cave?
- 9) Do you think you've developed a friendship with people in the Man Cave? If so, in what ways?
- 10) Have you begun deepening your relationship with God? If so, in what ways?

Participant No: _____

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